

**A STUDY OF INDIGENT CHILDREN IN DURBAN
BETWEEN 1900 AND 1945**

by

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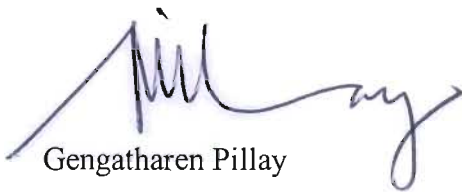
the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Durban - Westville

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DECLARATION

Except for the supervisor's intervention, this dissertation is the candidate's own original work and has not been submitted to any other university for any other degree.



Gengatharen Pillay



DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Saloshini and son Lasanthan.

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I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor, Professor M. Goedhals for her invaluable guidance, penetrating criticisms and support. I would also like to thank my wife Saloshini for her constant encouragement, assistance and unfailing enthusiasm and Ayub Sheik for his critical insights.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DC : Indian Documentation and Cultural Centre

DTCF : Durban Town Clerk's Files

KCAL : Killie Campbell Africana Library

NIC : Natal Indian Congress

NA : Natal Archives

SAIRR : South African Institute of Race Relations

GLOSSARY

The race classification on the left was used in this dissertation. However, in quotations and reference to legislation the corresponding terms on the right were used, to reflect the actual terms used in the period this study covers. The use of such terms in this study that have come to acquire offensive or derogatory racial connotations, do not reflect the views of the writer.

Black : non - white, non - European

African : Bantu, Black, native

Indian : Asiatic, South African Indian

White : European

ABSTRACT

The study of the history of children has been marginalised over the centuries. Children are the lifeblood of any society and play a significant role in its development. It was only recently that the role of children was recognized.

This study focuses on reasons for indigency in early twentieth century Durban. It establishes the various socio - economic factors responsible for this phenomenon. This led to the abuse of children's rights and the rise of child indigency. The incidence of child labour and vagrant children roaming the streets of Durban led to white philanthropists forming the Durban Child Welfare Society. Indigent children of colour were denied access to this welfare society. In 1927, two institutions were established to cater for indigent Indian children, The Aryan Benevolent Children's Home and The Durban Indian Child Welfare.

The Great Depression saw a phenomenal increase in the number of indigent children in Durban. Municipal authorities were reluctant to confront the rising tide of indigent black children. After negative press coverage, the municipality established the Bantu Child Welfare Society in 1936. This was inadequate to cater for the burgeoning number of indigent children. Social activists later developed places of safety, such as the Brandon Bantu Home and the Motale Lads' Hostel to assist indigent African and Indian children

The outbreak of World War Two and a relaxation of influx control led to a diaspora of Africans to the city. The reversal of influx control led to a series of socio-economic challenges for African children particularly. Unemployment, coupled with indigency, soared resulting in children loitering the streets of white suburbs in search of jobs and food. Complaints from recalcitrant white residents led to the arrest and detention of children between the ages of 6 and 16 at the notorious Overport Detention Barracks. Appalling conditions at these barracks led to a public outcry. Child care crusaders, ensured that appropriate action was taken to rectify the situation. This prompted a shift in government policy towards childcare for black indigent children in Durban.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Why study children?

‘Children are not only our future, but are rather our present, and we need to start taking their voices very seriously,’ according to Carol Bellamy of United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).¹ The increasing number of indigent children in South Africa and in Durban particularly forms the background to this study. The research will focus on a brief history of children from a global, national and a local perspective, with particular emphasis on child indigency. It will examine the reasons for the progressive increase in the number of 'street waifs' since the early 1900s, the role of government and non-governmental organizations in addressing this issue and will offer some creative suggestions on how to alleviate child indigency. Although the study is signposted up until 1945, the phenomenon of child indigency continues to plague society.

The discursive notion of childhood in history

Little or no status was accorded to children up until the late nineteenth century. In most writings children seem to be portrayed as insignificant, because it was argued that their views were unformed or uninformed. Children were invisible socially and were regarded as unimportant in the progress of a nation; they are rarely recorded in history books.² This was largely due to the lack of evidence in the form of primary historical sources on children.

1. Quoted in The Daily News, 20 November 2002, p.1.

2. S. Burman and P. Reynolds: Growing up in a divided society, The contexts of childhood in South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986), pp.1-3.

Laslett confirms this view and contends that,

...crowds and crowds of little children are strangely absent from the written record.... There is something mysterious about the silence of all these multitudes of babes in arms, toddlers and adolescents in statements men made at the time about their own experience. Children appear of course, but so seldom and in such an indefinite way that we know very little indeed about child nurture in pre-industrial times...³

A number of viewpoints have been put forward for this apparent indifference towards children. Hardman states that both women and children form part of 'muted groups' who are construed as being elusive to anybody examining society. He suggested that they were socialized to be submissive and deferential in order to complement masculine attitudes, this was done in order not to challenge gender stereotypes.⁴ Therefore society was forced to conform, to adapt themselves around men's values and mores.

It is also argued that the notion of childhood in certain periods in history and in some societies was so circumscribed that it was almost obliterated out of existence.

It is interesting to note that children were rarely the subjects of medieval paintings.

Historians such as Aries used this fact to surmise that the notion of childhood had not been adequately conceptualized by then. Instead, children were widely regarded as smaller versions of adults and were afforded no differential treatment, status or legal protection.⁵

3. P. Laslett: The World We Have Lost (London, Methuen, 1965), pp.104-105.

4. C. Hardman: 'Can there be an anthropology of children?' Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford, 4,11, (1973), pp.85-99.

5. P. Aries: Centuries of Childhood (London, Peregrine Books, 1986), pp.1-5.

Various debilitating myths abounded about children. For example, children were not breastfed because of the widespread belief that they were parasites who drained their mothers. In Family life in Plymouth, Demos also points out that there was no distinction between children's clothing and adult's clothing. This supported the perception that children were miniature adults, the boy was a little model of his father and the girl, that of her mother.⁶ Adulthood was commonly perceived to have been attained at the age of seven.

It was in the late eighteenth century that egalitarian notions of childhood surfaced. The child became regarded as an important member of the nuclear family. This perception was largely due to the influence of the Enlightenment, the advent of democratic practices in Europe and the growing concern for human suffrage. Shorter in his study The making of the modern family, suggests that this change in perception about children was due to modernization and the overwhelming character of consumer culture.⁷ The idea of the nuclear family was promoted out of sheer commercial imperatives. Capitalism advanced the perception that the material needs of children were crucial obligations to be met by adults with the necessary spending power. In this way the material needs of children were commodified into a thriving industry, which reaped substantial profits. It was also in the 1800's that the rights of children regarding labour, health, delinquency and care came to enjoy the institutional protection of the state. The subsequent section will focus on the reasons for child indigence and the establishment of institutional care.

6. J. Demos: Family life in Plymouth (London, Oxford University Press, 1970), pp.3-6.

7. E. Shorter: The making of the modern family (London, William Collins, 1976), pp.9-12.

The effects of industrialization and urbanization - Britain as a case study

This study, in examining the indigent child in the twentieth century Durban, aims to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. It will focus on the indigent child in a modern, industrialized and urbanized context. Hence an understanding of the origins and implications of industrialization and urbanization needs elaboration.

The Industrial Revolution began in England around 1760. This led to an extensive diaspora of parents and children from the rural to urban areas. They sought jobs in factories in order to improve their quality of life.

Industrial towns in England grew rapidly, for example Manchester, Leeds and Bradford had populations of 100 000, 53 000 and 13 000 respectively in 1801. By 1851 these figures increased significantly to 367 000, 172 000 and 104 000.⁸ These towns and cities, including London, came into existence before the days of town councils and planning boards. This lack of organisation and control resulted in overcrowding, pollution and 'back to back houses', the rise of tenements and the mushrooming of slums.⁹ Public health was neglected, for example, sanitary systems and water supplies were basic with sewage running along open drains in the streets and water for daily consumption having to be collected from communal taps. Unhealthy conditions persisted and diseases such as cholera and typhoid were common, especially among children.

8. R. Unwin: The Industrial Revolution (Essex, Century Hutchinson Limited, 1986), pp.16-17.

9. H. Martin: Britain since 1800: Towards the Welfare state (London, Macmillan Limited, 1988), pp.9-16.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries families living in the agricultural sector were large in number. Children were considered to be 'economic assets' because of the contribution they made on the family's smallholdings. The quality of life in the agricultural sector was poor and many families decided to migrate to the towns. However families could not survive on the incomes of fathers, as wages were low. As a result women and children were urged to work in appalling conditions in factories and mines to supplement the family income. The growth of industrialization and capitalism led to the disintegration of the once close-knit nuclear family.¹⁰

Industries had no legislation in place that monitored working conditions, wages and job descriptions of workers. This left workers exposed to exploitation. Indigent children were frequently used by many industrialists for their labour and were referred to as 'apprentices'. The misuse of child labour was common, for instance six-year-olds were employed in coal mines. They worked for up to sixteen hours a day in dangerous, damp and even crouched surroundings. Small boys, especially, were employed as chimney sweeps and sometimes, despite their diminutive stature became stuck and suffocated before assistance arrived. Others encountered accidents in the mines and factories. If children could not find employment parents forced them to beg.¹¹ Some children were found idling on the streets. If they could not contribute to the family income, they were generally thrown out of the home.¹²

10. G. Kent: Poverty (London, Dorstel Press Limited, 1968), pp.30-36.

11. P.F.Speed: History through maps and diagrams (Oxford, Pergamon Press Limited, 1985), pp.34-39.

12. S.Case and D. Hall: A Social and Economic History of Britain (London, Edward Arnold, 1977), p.41.

During the early 1800's the exploitation and abuse of children was rampant as Muncie argues 'unemployed boys were often sold by their parents to chimney sweeps, with girls going to brothel keepers or beggars, who would use them as they pleased'.¹³

By 1820 unemployment amongst men rose rapidly, because more women and children were employed in the industrial and mining sectors. They provided a cheaper source of labour. In some instances this resulted in many men turning to alcohol, which contributed to the neglect of their families. The incidence of immorality, illegitimacy and divorce soared. This affected children emotionally.¹⁴

Families who were unable to eke a living were sent to 'workhouses'. These were specifically built by the government for paupers and were regarded as places of shame where the old, infirm and poverty stricken was sent to seek refuge. Orphaned children were removed from these workhouses with promises of food, clothing and shelter in return for unpaid labour until they turned twenty-one. The poor treatment of both women and children in most industries prompted the British Parliament to pass legislation between 1833 and 1847, which regulated their age and hours of work. Although these laws were introduced to improve the working conditions of women and children, Linda Richter points out that in "1848 there were an estimated 30 000 naked, filthy, roaming, lawless and deserted children quite distinct from the ordinary poor known as 'street arabs' in London alone."¹⁵

13. J. Muncie: 'The trouble with kids today', (London, Hutchinson, 1984), pp.21-32.

14. P.F.Speed: 'History through maps and diagrams', pp.40-43.

15. L.M. Richter: 'South African Street Children: comparisons with Anglo-American Runaways', paper read at the Regional Conference of the International Association for Cross-cultural Psychology, Amsterdam, June 27 - July 1, 1989, p.5.

Children were driven to a life on the streets as a direct result of the brute tyranny of parents, orphanhood, destitution and poverty. Charles Dickens aptly captures the essence of working class children, by romanticizing the streetwise ‘artful dodger’ in his book ‘Oliver Twist’.¹⁶

Africa and the developing world

Industrialization and urbanization also affected Africa and the developing world. The exploitation of labour and resources impacted negatively on the developing world’s economy. It has been reported that in developing countries of Africa, Latin America, the Far East and the Caribbean that millions of children can be defined as being ‘on’ and ‘off’ the streets. This was directly attributed to the effects of colonialism.

In the 1930s Sanders studied the issues of indigent children in Cairo, Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro. He established that it was impossible to estimate the number of indigent children on the street and it is not unusual for governments to cite rather low statistics to avoid criticism of their child care policies. In fact, governments around the world are either reluctant to acknowledge the problem or give little consideration to the real conditions under which indigent children live.¹⁷ The impact of urbanization yielded devastating results. In Cairo, for instance, ‘children who elsewhere might be in kindergarten can be found digging through clots of ox dung, looking for undigested kernels of corn to eat’.¹⁸ The effects of urbanization has also had far reaching implications on the South African family.

16. Muncie: ‘The trouble with kids today’, pp.21-32.

17. W.B. Sanders: *Juvenile delinquency* (United States of America, Praeger Publishers, 1976), pp.3-4.

18. *Times International*, 10 January 1993.

CHAPTER TWO

LOCAL PERSPECTIVE – SOUTH AFRICA (1900 TO 1930)

Factors that led to child indigency

In this study on the spread of child indigency in Durban, a brief historical overview of urbanization in South Africa's cities will be undertaken. Discussions on South Africa's population will make reference to whites, coloureds¹, Africans² and Indians. This is done, because the white minority government separated each race group in terms of their colour and implemented segregatory policies accordingly. Provision, for example, funding and the distribution of land was undertaken according to a single criterion and that was race.

Johannesburg

During the late nineteenth century South Africa underwent a process of urbanization especially after minerals were found on the Reef area of the Transvaal. The mining industry, particularly, required a constant supply of cheap labour, which gave rise to an influx of Africans to the city. However the process of full African proletarianisation only began to accelerate in the second decade of the twentieth century. The effects of the 1913 Land Act, unlike those of earlier laws, were designed to move African men off the land and into wage labour, thus extending proletarianisation to entire families.³

1. Coloureds - during successive governments up until 1954, this racial group known as coloured was usually given 'honorary' white status. This resulted in coloured indigent children being accepted in white places of safety. Hence for the purpose of this thesis a separate study on coloured indigent children has not been undertaken.
2. Africans were referred to and called 'native' or 'bantu' by the white minority government. However in this study, the term African will be used.
3. E. Koch: 'Without Visible Means of subsistence: Slumyard culture in Johannesburg 1918-1940', in B. Bozzoli (ed.) Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983), p.152.

This combined with a series of floods and droughts propelled thousands of Africans onto the labour market.

In 1904, 77 000 Africans were employed on the gold and coal mines of the Transvaal. This number doubled in 1913 to 155 000 and redoubled to 318 000 in 1936. Conditions for lowly paid African mine labourers were harsh and oppressive, with the majority of workers having to live in compounds. Only a small percentage of the African labour force (about 1% of 200 000 workers) lived in married quarters.⁴

As a result of the growing African population in towns there was an urgent need for accommodation. The municipality responded cautiously and built townships for Africans; the first of which was built in Klipspruit, Johannesburg in 1906. This accommodation was inadequate, and later resulted in the mushrooming of urban slums. In Johannesburg, slums emerged in Vrededorp, Doornfontein and Jeppe.⁵ These undesirable living conditions, endemic mainly among African families, impacted negatively on children. They endeavoured to escape from this vicious cycle of poverty by turning to the streets for solace.

As early as 1906, 'amalaita' gangs came into existence. These were groups of young African boys, mainly domestic workers, whose areas of operation were the eastern townships and slums of Johannesburg. They engaged in petty crime, forging passes and

4. P. Maylam: A History of African People of South Africa: From early Iron Age to the 1970's (London, Croom Helm, 1986), p.145.

5. Koch: 'Without Visible Means of subsistence', p.153-154.

the trafficking of liquor: 'alcohol was the thread which held together the environment of the insanitary shacks, sheds and backyards....' ⁶

By the 1920s and 1930s, "boys from the various slum areas would form themselves into gangs of 'laaities' (those wise in the ways of the city...) and would jealously protect their areas of operation.... Sophiatown 'laaities' monopolized caddying jobs at a golf course in Auckland Park and together with gangs from Vrededorp controlled the begging and pickpocketing at the market." ⁷

Cape Town

In the early 1900s the Cape also experienced rapid urbanization especially around the harbour districts. The exploitation of labour and the lack of adequate housing gave rise to slums. However in 1902, the Cape Town municipality established the first formal housing project referred to as Ndebeni. This accommodated the urbanized sector of the African and Coloured communities. The working conditions of the dockworkers mainly in the Cape harbour area worsened and in 1919 the Industrial Commercial Workers Union (ICU) was specifically formed to highlight their grievances. The wages of black workers in South Africa increased more during the 1921 –1925 period than in any other period from 1900 to 1970. ⁸ This was largely motivated by a number of small strikes, which pressurized employers to increase wages.

6. Maylam: A History of African People of South Africa, p.150.

7. J. Swart: 'An anthropological study of street children in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, with special reference to their moral values', MA thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1988, p.48-49.

8. N. Parsons: A New History of Southern Africa (Cape Town, Macmillan, 1982), pp.46-248.

As the population swelled at Ndebeni, it posed a serious problem to the neighbouring industries, this prompted the municipality to relocate its people to Langa in 1927.⁹ Here people faced severe socio-economic problems and unemployment increased. This led to the dislocation of the family system. Children, especially, were faced with hunger, poverty, disease and even abuse. Against this background of change, many indigent children took to the streets as a mechanism to escape their hateful home backgrounds and were generally referred to as 'strollers'.¹⁰

The growth in the number of indigent children was largely due to the deterioration of the extended family system. This was compounded by numerous repressive laws, urbanization and the ever-increasing pressure of westernisation. These conditions were also prevalent in Durban, which is the main area of focus.

Durban

Historical background

The effects of the trends mentioned above will be discussed in greater detail with regard to the growing city of Durban. Since Durban is the focus of this study, an overview of this city's history is vital. The strategic location of Durban allowed her to become the principal port city in South Africa.¹¹

9. Maylam: A History of African People of South Africa, p.149.

10. L M. Richter: 'Street children: the nature and scope of the problem in Southern Africa', paper to National Association of Child Care Workers' National Workshop On Street Children, Cape Town, July 1988, p.5.

11. P. Maylam and I. Edwards (eds.): The People's City: African Life in twentieth century Durban (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1996), pp. 2-3.

Durban was an important link between the Witwatersrand and the sea route between the East and Europe. From the 1890s Durban offered the shortest port-rail link between the coast and the mineral rich Witwatersrand – Vaal triangle conurbation.

By 1904, the first steam ship sailed into the bay directly, which gave Durban the impetus to develop into the largest port in South East Africa.¹²

Durban attracted potential manufacturers for two reasons. The city was ideally located, firstly for those industries whose raw materials were imported into the country; and secondly for those manufacturers who would make use of Natal's agricultural base in sugar and wattle. As a result, pioneering service industries were established in the vicinity of the port, for example the paint industry, which depended on imported components. Another industry dependent on importation was the soap industry, which was established by Lever Brothers in 1908.¹³

Durban's industry flourished as a result of its ports and railways, and many of her goods were sold nationally although this was outweighed by the Witwatersrand's industrial output. By 1915/16 Durban's industrial output was 25%, while the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) area was producing 29.9%, of the total national industrial output. By 1922/23 Durban's industrial production was 22,6% while the PWV's production was 37.3%.¹⁴ The PWV's industrial production far outweighed

12. Ibid, p.3.

13. M.Katzen: Industry in Greater Durban, Part 1: Its Growth and Structure (Pietermaritzburg, Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission, 1961), pp.59-60.

14. B. Freund: Insiders and Outsiders (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1995), p.81.

Durban's in the early twentieth century and as a result Durban's industrial sector had to diversify production in order to maintain competition levels. In the 1900s the city thrived in carriage building, ship and wagon repairs, the manufacture of machinery for the sugar and coal-mining industries and even wrought iron works.¹⁵

Other manufacturing industries also thrived, such as Coedmore quarry, the Lion Match Factory, Charles Wade and Son, an engineering company, and the whaling station on the Bluff. The outbreak of World War One in 1914, served as a catalyst for Durban's industrial sector, for example, Thomson and Savage, the military clothing supplier and Natal Cane By Products, a company which designed industrial uses for molasses and cane products, were established.¹⁶

Durban also became a major tourist attraction. With its relatively good summers and beaches, large crowds of local whites and overseas visitors frequented Durban.¹⁷ This diverse economy was served well by its people (mainly Africans, whites and Indians)

In the early twentieth century, Durban's population was small, with a total population of about 55 700 of whom 14 600 were African.¹⁸

The majority of the city's residents, both black and white, lived in the municipal area of 12.5 square miles. This area was narrow and flanked in the east by the Indian Ocean, in

15. Katzen: Industry in Greater Durban, pp.1 and 131.

16. Ibid, p.60.

17. H. Burrows: Studies of Indian Employment in Natal (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1961), pp.176-177.

18. Maylam: A History of the African People of South Africa, pp.148-149.

the south by the harbour and the Umbilo River, in the west by the Berea Ridge and in the north by the Umgeni River. These areas are illustrated in maps 1, 2 and 3 that are found on pages 15, 16 and 17 respectively.¹⁹

Durban's economy developed from the expertise of a number of racial groups. This will be illustrated by examining, in brief, the role of Whites and Indians and in greater detail the African population.

The need for labour in Durban

The growth of the mining industry on the Witwatersrand in the late nineteenth century had a positive effect on Durban's economy and hence there was an immense demand for cheap labour. With a boom in trade, Durban's population also began to grow rapidly. Because of the prevarications of segregation each population group will be dealt with separately.

Whites

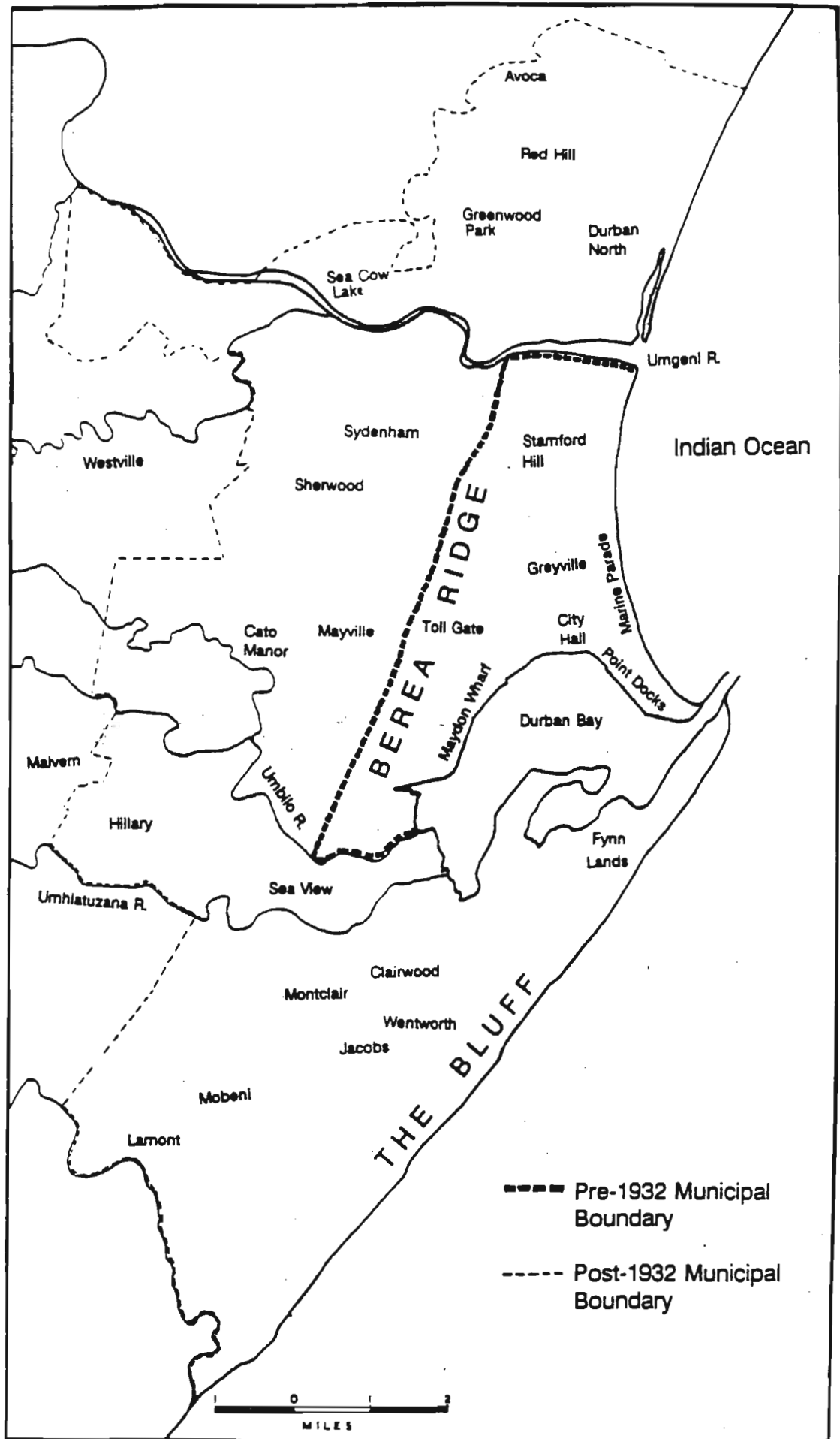
Whites in early twentieth century Durban were employed as white collar or clerical workers, educationists or those involved in the commercial and industrial sectors. Whites who settled in Durban came mainly from the Transvaal, the Cape and also Britain.²⁰ They were mainly English speaking, secured good land, had the best facilities at their disposal, acquired the most lucrative jobs and led essentially comfortable lives.²¹

19. T.A.Nuttall: 'Class, Race and Nation: African politics in Durban, 1929 –1949', PhD. thesis, University of Oxford, London, 1991, p.13.

20. Burrows: Studies of Indian Employment in Natal, pp.35-40.

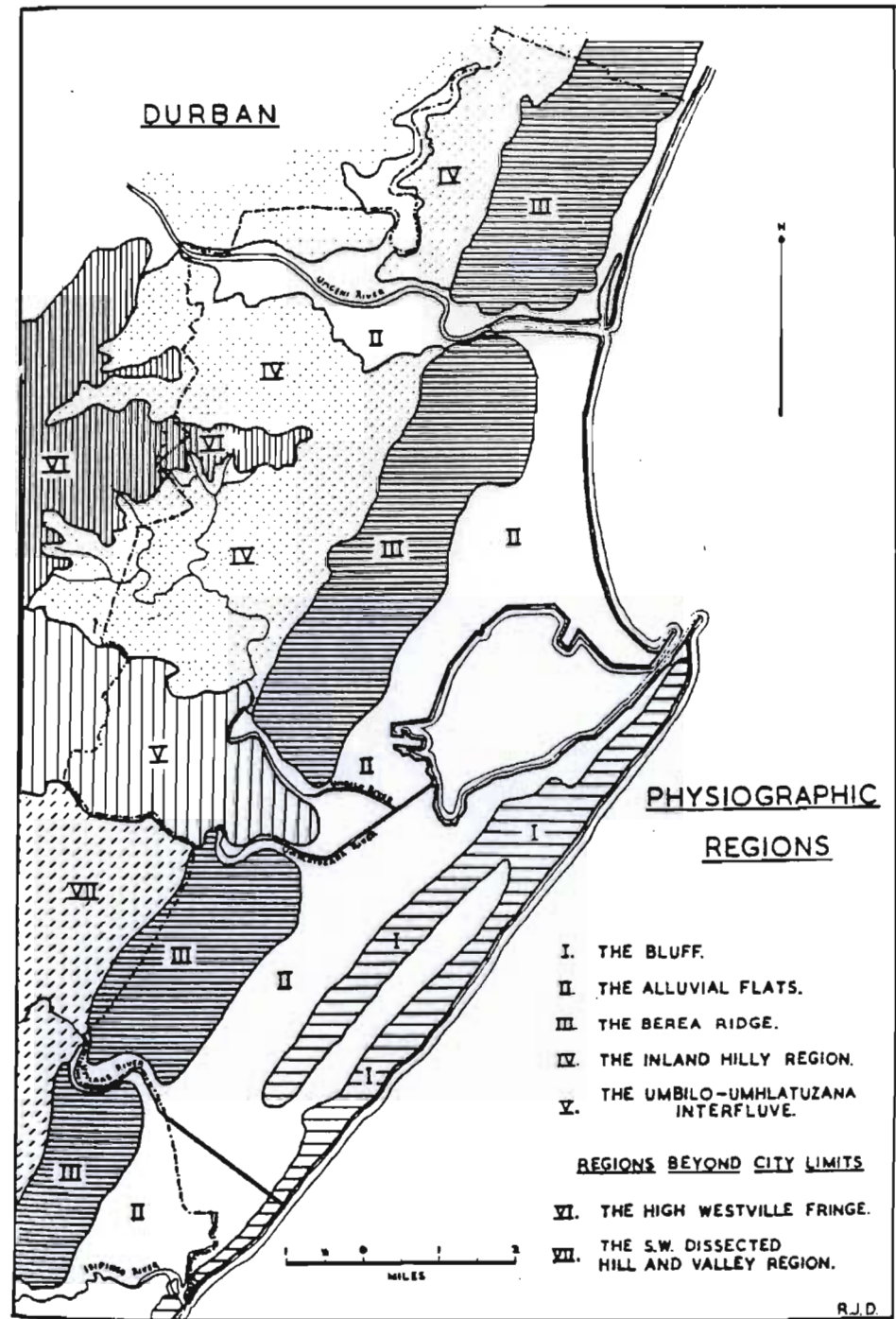
21. B.L. Reid: 'Organized Labour in Natal, 1918-1924', MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1975, pp. 68-87.

Map 1. Durban and surrounding districts during the 1920 s and 1930 s



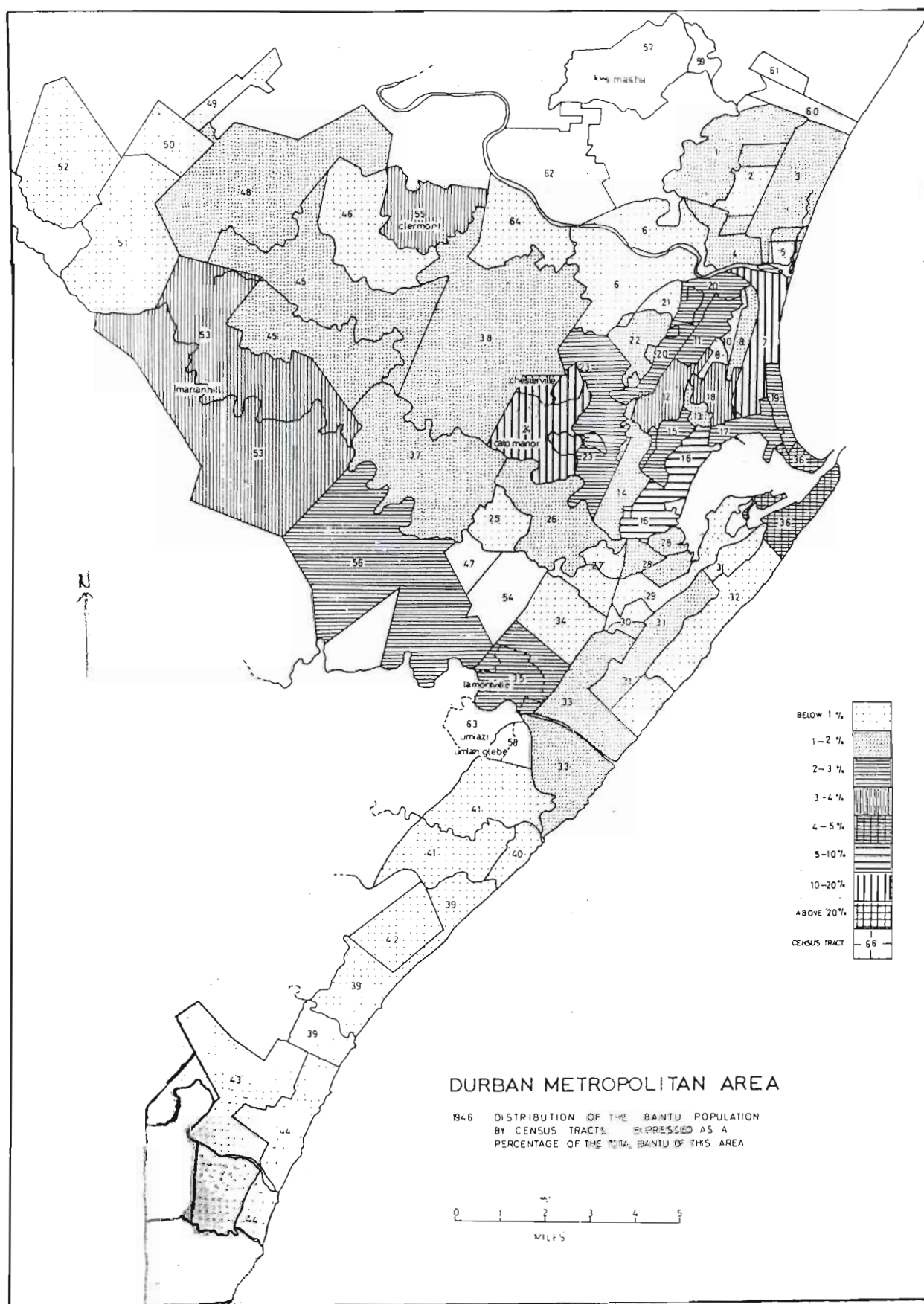
Source: Nuttall: 'Class, Race and Nation: African politics in Durban, 1929 -1949', p. 13a.

Map 2. Durban, Physiographic Regions



Source: L. Kuper, H Watts, and R. Davies: *Durban: A Study in Racial Ecology* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1958), p.97.

Map 3. Distribution of Africans in Durban after 1930.



Source: M. Sugden: 'The Bantu of the Durban Metropolitan Area: A Case Study in Population Analysis', M.Sc. thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1965, p.29.

They had an elevated status because of their electoral power, skills and culture of superiority. The University of Natal Housing Survey of 1929 illustrated that wealthy whites lived in the upper parts of the Berea Ridge, the middle class lived in ownership houses and flats on the lower parts of the Ridge, while the working class or 'poor whites' rented flats mainly in the city centre or harbour districts.²² 'Poor whites' experienced many problems, especially unemployment, during and after World War One.

La Hausse points out that African women together with some 'low class whites' were dealing in the illicit liquor trade. This they supplied to African men living in the city.²³ 'Poor white' families were affected by unemployment, which led to a deterioration of the nuclear family and ultimately had a detrimental effect on their children. This state of affairs, a government report said, weakened white rule 'the European minority, occupying.... the position of the dominant race cannot allow a considerable number of its members to sink into poverty and to fall below the level of the non- European workers.'²⁴

Indians

With Durban's economy experiencing a boom in the early twentieth century, because of its evolving infrastructure, harbour and associated industries, the need for cheap, unskilled labour became increasingly necessary. The Indian population, many of whom had arrived in Natal in November 1860, mainly as indentured workers on the sugar plantations, gradually moved closer to the greater Durban area to seek employment as

22. Nuttall: 'Class, Race and Nation: African politics in Durban, 1929 –1949', p.15.

23. P. la Hausse: 'The Struggle for the City: Alcohol, the Ematsheni and Popular Culture in Durban 1900-1936', MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984, pp.50-55.

24. J. Pampallis: Foundations of the New South Africa (Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1991), pp.127-128.

their periods of indenture came to an end.²⁵

Merchant class Indians lived close to their businesses, which was cheaper and more accessible. The heart of this area was the Grey Street mosque which was surrounded by a number of small businesses offering services like tailoring, watch repair, trade in jewellery, spice and Indian condiments, clothing, household goods and utensils.²⁶

Although the area resembled a ghetto, it was indeed the residential heart of Durban's passenger Indians and Muslims who formed the largest part of the Indian population in the city. By the late nineteenth century, the area around the undrained 'Western vlei' was occupied by mainly working class Indians and was later referred to as a 'Coolie location' by the white municipal authorities.²⁷

Many of the ex-indentured Indians lived to the north of the city centre in an area referred to as Magazine Barracks which was overcrowded, had poor sanitation and lacked essential facilities. The municipality built these barracks in the 1880s in an attempt to create and regulate a stable supply of cheap labour. According to Omar these dwellings were of exceptionally poor quality and required urgent renovations to improve them.²⁸ In 1914, the municipality's medical officer condemned the place as uninhabitable. However residents had to endure these abject conditions because they had no alternative

25. M.D. North - Coombes: 'Indentured Labour in the Sugar Industries of Mauritius and Natal 1834-1910', in S. Bhana, ed., Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal (Leeds, Peepal Tree Press, 1990), pp.62-63.

26. Freund: Insiders and Outsiders, p.33.

27. M.W. Swanson: 'The sanitation syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-09', Journal of African History, 18,3, (1977), p.406.

28. R.H. Omar: 'The Relationship between the Durban Corporation and the Magazine Barracks', B.A. Honours essay, University of Durban -Westville, 1989, pp.40-45.

accommodation and the low wages they earned perpetuated their misery.²⁹ Presently in its place stands the Durban Police Headquarters and the Durban Magistrates' Court.

By the early 1900s a number of shanties (built with wood and iron) mushroomed in the swampy areas away from the city centre, which were often rented from white landlords. This is illustrated in map 4 on page 21, which shows Durban's city centre, streets and related venues.³⁰

According to a census undertaken in 1904, 13 % of Indian homes were built of brick, while 27% were made of wattle and daub and 58% of wood and iron. The percentage for white households was 63% brick, 1% wattle and daub 2% wood and iron respectively for the same period.³¹

The census also reported that Indians lived under cramped conditions. This was largely due to the extended family system. This was common among Indian families and it allowed for the pooling of resources and the accumulation of wealth.³² Wealth belonged to the Indian family as a whole rather than to individual members.

29. I.G. Halliday: 'The Indian Market Gardener of the Peri-urban Area', MA thesis, University of Natal, 1940, p.16.

30. M.W. Swanson: 'The Asiatic Menace: Creating Segregation in Durban.1870-1900', International Journal of African Historical Studies, pp.401-406.

31. Freund: Insiders and Outsiders, p.35.

32. S.Jithoo: 'Complex Households and Joint Families amongst Indians in Durban', in J. Argyle and E. Preston -Whyte (eds.), Social System and Tradition in Southern Africa (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1978), pp.207-210.

By 1927/28, the Borough of Durban had an approximate population of 123 000, of whom only 21 286 were Indian.³³ The table below illustrates the habitation patterns of the various race groups in the greater Durban area.

Racial composition of Durban – 1927/28³⁴

Place	Whites*	Africans	Indians
Durban Borough	59 600	42 100	21 286
South Coast Junction	3 036	7 250	13 850
Umhlatuzana	4 248	1 150	2 980
Malvern	3 200	1 250	1 800
Mayville	3 000	6 000	14 000
Sydenham	2 500	5 000	17 000
Pinetown	1 236	383	560
Greenwood Park	4 000	2 000	5 100

***Includes Coloureds**

The growth of the Indian population formed an integral part of Durban's economy. This increasingly alarmed the white electorate who considered Indians to be a 'surplus' or a 'problem'. With the onset of the Great Depression and the installation of Hertzog's pact government many Indian workers were fired and replaced by 'poor whites', which intensified the struggle experienced by the working class Indian family.³⁵

33. Natal Archives (NA), 3/DBN, 14/4/1, Durban Borough Boundaries Commission.

34. Ibid.

35. Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL), MS Mabel Palmer Papers, file 28, Indo-European Council, Unemployment Questionnaires.

Africans

Africans moved into the urban areas of South Africa from the late nineteenth century, mainly in search of work. With the development of Durban's harbour, a substantial cheap labour force was required. African men mainly, were either coerced to leave the rural areas or migrated to Durban. Initially there was no housing provided for African workers. One of the earliest attempts by the municipality to provide accommodation for male African labourers was the establishment of the first *togt*³⁶ barracks at the Point in 1878.³⁷ Later this became known as the Bell Street Barracks. By 1904, Maylam estimated that approximately 336 800 Africans worked in the urban centres, which represented 10.4% of the total African population in South Africa.³⁸

The steady increase of Africans to the city became a concern for the municipal authorities. In 1904, the Natal legislature passed the Native Locations Act, which stated Urban segregation should begin in earnest in both Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The Durban municipality refused to use white ratepayers finances to either subsidize or provide any further sites for the establishment of African locations.³⁹ Financial impediments were overcome when the municipality legislated the Native Beer Act of 1908 (Act No. 23 of 1908), under which the sale of sorghum beer became a municipal monopoly. The profits were to be used to pay for 'Native' Administration, such as the establishment of further accommodation. This formed the thrust of the infamous 'Durban System' and as La Hausse points out 'it was a system of native administration which

36. 'Togt' refers to hire of labour on a casual or daily basis.

37. Sugden: 'The Bantu of the Durban Metropolitan Area: A Case Study in Population Analysis', p.7.

38. Maylam: *The People's City*, p.15.

39. M.Maasdorp and A.S.B.Humphreys (eds.): *From Shantytown: An Economic Study of African Poverty and Rehousing in a South African City* (Cape Town, Juta, 1975), pp.10-14.

became the model for the ruling class domination and exploitation of the African popular classes in urban centres throughout South Africa'.⁴⁰

Subsequently there was a proliferation of municipal beer halls, especially at hostels and transport depots within the city. As a result, the sale of sorghum beer swelled the city's coffers and Hemson indicates that it earned a massive 41 677 pounds per annum.⁴¹

However the municipality was reluctant to plough back all the profits made from the sale of beer for the upliftment of the African worker, although the Native Revenue account always reflected a positive balance. The success of the municipal beer halls hinged on the use of brutal police coercion. The sale of beer outside the confines of the municipal beer halls was declared illegal. The police were given unprecedented authority to use force and interfere in the lives of Africans. Regular notorious liquor and pass raids were undertaken.⁴²

By 1916 a major legislative step was taken with the formation of a separate Native Administration Department, which was controlled by the municipality. This illustrated the extent of profits that was generated from the sale of beer. The new system was complicated and included the checking and even registration of African residents.⁴³ A night curfew and the checking of passes regulated the movement and employment of

40. P. La Hausse: 'Drink and Cultural Innovation in Durban: The Origin of the Beerhall in South Africa, 1902-16' in J. Crush and C. Ambler (eds.) *Liquor and Labour in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1993), pp.112-115.

41. D. Hemson: 'Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock Workers of Durban', Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 1979, p.135.

42. Nuttall: 'Class, Race and Nation: African politics in Durban, 1929 -1949', p.21.

43. La Hausse: 'Drink and Cultural Innovation in Durban', pp.112-115.

Africans living in Durban. African migrant labourers continued to occupy the city in the early twentieth century, because their labour was required for the development of secondary industries. By the 1920s there were at least 565 manufacturing establishments in the Durban area alone and urbanized Africans provided a large proportion of the skilled and permanent labour force. However, there was still a shortage of state sponsored accommodation for African workers. By 1921, it was estimated that the African population of Durban was almost 28 400.⁴⁴ Large proportions of Africans working in Durban were male and by 1921 the African male – female ratio was 6.6:1.⁴⁵ This was due largely to the municipality's policy regarding labour recruitment and further the labour needs of the city. Cheap male labour was in particular required in the shipping industry.

The need for labour far outstripped the provision of accommodation in the urban center. The Durban municipality reluctantly began the erection of small a township called Baumannville in 1916, for African families. This township was eventually completed in 1928 with 128 cottages. This was the only housing available for Africans until the construction of Lamont in 1934.⁴⁶

The Native Urban Areas Act of 1923

The continued growth of the urban African population in the major cities of South Africa prompted the Union government to increase its legal power. In order to curtail and

44. Maylam: A History of African People in South Africa, p.149.

45. Maasdorp and Humphreys (eds.): From Shantytown to Township, An Economic Study of African Poverty and Rehousing in a South African City, p.10.

46. Maylam: A History of African People in South Africa, pp.149-150.

control the influx of Africans to the city centres and to prevent the intermingling of the 'poor whites' and blacks, the government passed the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923. This was the first major intervention by the central government to regulate on a broad front the presence of Africans in the urban areas.⁴⁷ It gave local authorities the power to demarcate and establish African locations on the outskirts of white urban and industrial areas, and to determine access to and funding of these areas. Local authorities were empowered to administer the registration of African service contracts and to determine the extent of African beer brewing or trading rights in the locations. The critical function entrusted to local authorities was the administration of tougher pass laws, Africans who were deemed 'redundant' to the labour needs of white businesses could be deported to the reserves.⁴⁸

Although the Urban Areas Act of 1923 set a pattern for the future, it failed to centralise or regularize the administration of urban Africans. Maylam argues that the 1923 Act established the principle of urban segregation, but non-racial communities continued to exist.⁴⁹ In terms of this Act, white areas could only be proclaimed if alternate accommodation was found for displaced people. The Durban municipality was reluctant to provide this. Little effort was made by the municipality to curtail the influx of Africans into the city. This was due largely to the demand for cheap labour by industrialists and white businesses. It was estimated that by the late 1920s Durban industrial sector required approximately 10 000 African men per year. This was in contradiction to the philosophy

47. D. Hindson: Pass Controls and the Urban Proletariat in South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), pp.32-42.

48. Maylam: The People's City, pp.5-7.

49. Ibid, A History of African People in South Africa, p.151.

of the Urban Areas Act of 1923. The lack of accommodation for Africans led to the construction of informal settlements, on the border of the Durban municipal area, in places such as Cato Manor, the banks of the Umgeni River, 'Happy Valley' on the Bluff and in Rossburgh.⁵⁰

African women

There was a severe imbalance in the male- female ratio of Africans in the city. Simkins states that the ratio of women to men was far higher in the peri-urban districts than in the hostel-dominated city centre. This was attributed to the Durban municipality's hostile attitude to African women, who they felt were synonymous with 'creeping urbanization'. In response, the municipality did everything in its power to expel African women from the city because of the limited job opportunities, because by 1929 men dominated the domestic labour sector. African women eked a living by working in the informal sector. Many pursued a livelihood by selling 'illegal' liquor to African male clientele.⁵¹

This impacted negatively on the coffers of the municipality, which was bent on the immediate closure of these shebeens (illegal backyard bars) and the immediate repatriation of African women from the city to rural areas. In 1926, 5 819 African women were expelled in term of the vagrancy by-laws. However, many remained in the city and continued to brew beer. Large numbers of African women became 'permanent urban dwellers' and the municipal authorities found it increasingly difficult to remove them.⁵²

50. Ibid, pp.152-153.

51. C. Simkins: 'African Urbanization at the Time of the Last Smuts Government', paper at the Economic History Conference, University of Cape Town, 1982, p.10.

52. Ibid, pp.11-13.

Hertzog's Native Bills

Hertzog's Pact Government was not satisfied with its attack on black labour, but was also agitating for an end to African franchise rights. In 1926 Hertzog's government presented a set of segregatory bills to parliament, in an attempt to curtail African franchise rights.

These four bills were interdependent and had the following aims:

- To remove Africans in the Cape Province from the common voters' roll. African voters were to be represented by seven white MP's.
- To establish a Native Representative Council, some members of which would be nominated by the government and some elected with restricted powers
- To add slightly more land to the reserves in accordance with the Beaumont Commission.
- To confirm the franchise rights of Coloureds in the Cape and to extend the qualified franchise to Coloured men in other provinces.⁵³

Hertzog could not muster the necessary two-thirds parliamentary majority to effect the amendment to the constitution. The passage of the bills had to wait another ten years for it to be legislated under the United Party of Hertzog and Smuts.

Indigent children of Durban in the early 1900s

The inhabitants of Durban duly felt the effects of urbanization in the early twentieth century. The fluctuations in the need for labour, and the associated problems experienced after World War One and the municipality's inability to handle the socio-economic challenges impacted negatively on the family life of people living in the city. Children

53. Pampallis: Foundations of the New South Africa, pp.128-129.

were severely affected by this process, as a discussion of the impact of destitution on white, Indian and African children will reveal.

White children

Urbanization had limited impact on white families. Whites generally lived in nuclear families and in most instances the father was the wage earner. In the early 1900s, most whites had good jobs, earned well and invariably enjoyed a good quality of life. On the other hand working class whites experienced difficulties in securing permanent jobs and hence faced unemployment, poverty and destitution. This contributed to the disintegration of the nuclear family. Children were the most affected by this scenario. Further, during World War One, the decline of South Africa's economy compounded the situation of poverty among white working class families. The incidence of poverty, malnutrition and destitution among children grew worse. In an effort to assist indigent children, institutional care was implemented.

In 1918 Dr Sam Campbell (founder of Durban Child Welfare) and his wife, together with Edith Benson and Harriet Coates founded the Children's Aid Society in a room in Murchies' Passage, Smith Street, Durban. The society opened on three afternoons a week to cater for only white indigent children who required financial and emotional assistance. In 1919 the society formulated its constitution and was subsequently registered as the 'Child Welfare Society'.⁵⁴ After World War One, the incidence of destitution increased substantially resulting in the emergence of 'poor whites'.

54. Durban Child Welfare Brochure, 1921, pp.1-5.

According to Webb, the unemployment situation exacerbated the poverty levels. White describes, Maurice Webb as a philanthropist who became integrally involved in the relief of the plight of indigent African children in the 1920s. He was responsible for conscientising fellow white intellectuals on the evils of segregation and played a significant role in establishing child welfare institutions to cater for the indigent. He later became actively involved in the following organisations, South African Institute of Race Relations, the Brandon Bantu Hostel and the Durban Committee on Non - European Juvenile delinquency.⁵⁵

Webb further contended that the increasing number of indigent children necessitated larger premises. The society subsequently moved to a room in the basement of the City Hall and appointed an investigation committee to help locate and assist indigent children. The Child Welfare received overwhelming support from prominent Durban businesses such as H. Greenacre, John Orr, Payne Brothers and Townley Williams. Under pressure from the community the municipality decided to establish a Child Welfare Department, which was managed by Dr K. Mc Neill. The main aim of the welfare department was to secure the interests of white destitute children.⁵⁶ Although African and Indian children experienced similar social problems, Webb points out that the Child Welfare Society 'would not touch Native or Indian children', they only cared for white and coloured children. Webb made constant pleas to the Child Welfare to drop its colour bar, but his attempts were futile.

55. B. White: Maurice Webb: A case study in social welfare liberalism in Natal, 1926-1953, Journal of Natal and Zulu History, Vol. XV, 1994/1995.

56. KCAL, Webb Papers, file 6.

In 1920, about 9 white families experienced a total breakdown of the family system. The Child Welfare department was forced to relocate children from their parents into adoptive care. By 1923 the Adoption Act was passed to specifically prevent children from roaming the streets and to secure homes for children where they could get love, care and attention. The municipality subsequently made one acre of land available in Greyville.

On this land the first phase of what is today called the Greyville Crèche and the Clarence Road Pre - Primary School was built. This was a pioneering venture by the municipality to set up institutional care for white indigent children.⁵⁷ It must be pointed out that there were no white children inhabiting the streets of Durban in the early twentieth century, because the municipality put in place preventative measures.

Indian children

Indian families that arrived in Durban in the early 1900s were involved mainly in casual labour in the mining and agricultural sectors and earned meagre incomes. The joint family system was predominant among Indians who resided in Durban. The members of these families pooled their resources with some specializing in particular tasks, which stimulated the accumulation of wealth. Although family structure benefitted all its members, it was hardly characterized by equality. A hierarchical system of power existed and usually the labour of younger members was harnessed. Most of the households in the

57. Durban Child and Family Welfare Society 70th Annual Report, pp.1-2.

peri-urban areas had patriarchal heads. Women were badly treated and had little status in the household.⁵⁸ Women's work involved a mixture of both domestic and a range of activities including agricultural, commercial and even wage labour. In fact, in 1903 Hulett observed that the so-called 'free Indian' involved all members of the family in work, including children.⁵⁹ This had far reaching implications on the income of the family and it also illustrated the conditions under which Indians lived in order to sustain life.

The life of Indian labourers working in the city was harsh. Wages were low: two pounds per month was still typical in the 1920s. Indian workers were generally treated badly by their employers. They were underpaid, given rations in lieu of wages and were often excluded with preference given to white workers.⁶⁰

Health records indicate a high level of tuberculosis among Indian workers from the 1920s to 1940s. Furthermore, dysentery and malnutrition were common amongst children and the municipality did very little to alleviate this problem. With poverty reaching crisis proportions after World War One children were forced to seek employment, for instance in the tobacco industry, in order to supplement the income of their families.⁶¹

58. S. Bhana: Essays on indentured Indians in Natal (New Delhi, Promilla Publishers, 1991), pp.3-5.

59. The Indian Opinion, 14 September 1903.

60. Omar: 'The Relationship between the Durban Corporation and the Magazine Barracks', p.28.

61. M. Padayachee: 'Determinants of Wages and Wage Differentials among Indians in the Durban Municipal Area', Journal of the University of Durban - Westville, 4,2,1983, pp.176-190.

In 1921, a report revealed that living conditions were, extremely poor. For instance, it was estimated that the occupancy rate in Magazine Barracks was 3.5 people per room, communal taps were provided and the provision of toilets and sanitation was appalling.⁶²

By the 1920's Indians formed almost 25% of the wage earning population of Durban. Unemployment was generally high and the patriarchal head of the family usually drew on the resources of his family. Evans points out that children of working class Indians sought employment as waiters, cooks, drivers and even office boys. Education for Indian working class children was a luxury. It was estimated that only 3.6 % of Indian children received an education in 1921, and this was an initiative driven by the Indian community, not by the state.⁶³

Municipal authorities eagerly awaited the repatriation of Indians to India. For them Indians posed a problem. Hertzog's Pact Government responded by dismissing Indians and replacing them with 'poor whites. This impacted directly on Indian survival in the greater Durban area.⁶⁴ Destitution amongst Indians soared to new levels. In 1918 the President of the Arya Yuvuk Sabha, a cultural and humanitarian organization, D.G. Satyadeva, 'witnessed the battering of an Indian beggar, who had been sleeping in a municipal toilet in Victoria Street, by a policeman'.⁶⁵

62. Omar: 'The Relationship between the Durban Corporation and the Magazine Barracks', pp.28, 81.

63. M. Evans: Black and White in South East Africa (London, Longmans, 1911), p.288.

64. Indian Opinion, 5 July 1935.

65. Aryan Benevolent Home, Eightieth Anniversary Brochure, 1993, p.11.

Satyadeva empathized with the beggar and asked the question, 'Can't something be done to provide a home for the homeless?'⁶⁶

The Aryan Benevolent Home

On 18 July 1918, Satyadeva presented a challenging memorandum before the board of the Sabha for the establishment of an institution to care for the homeless. The board was unanimous in its decision that a home be built. Land was purchased in Bellair Road and on 1 May 1921, Bhawani Sannyasi officially opened the Aryan Benevolent Home.⁶⁷

The wood and iron building was used as living quarters for administration workers, the caretaker and as a home for the destitute. Financially the home was run on donations from wealthy Indian businesses. Businesses which were making profits, decided to donate money as part of their contribution to society. The stallholders in the Durban Indian market also donated 'unsold perishables' such as fruit and vegetables to the Home. After much lobbying by board members, the provincial government made its first financial contribution of fifty pounds in 1923. By 1925 the grant doubled, this was largely due to the number of destitute people the Home housed. In the same year the Home assumed responsibility for admitting people who were sent directly from the Indian Protector's Office. The Home, far from being a private institution, was now accepting people from the police, hospitals, the aged, feeble and weak and those that required special care and attention.⁶⁸

66. Ibid, p.12.

67. The Natal Advertiser, 5 May 1921.

68. Aryan Benevolent Home Eightieth Anniversary Brochure, 1993, p.11.

With the Pact Government's policy of securing the interests of the white community, Indian workers were often dismissed from employment and many were left destitute. In the process children experienced the pangs of poverty. The Aryan Benevolent Home received innumerable requests from destitute families to accommodate Indian orphans who were in need of care and protection from the ravages of poverty and homelessness. On 7 October 1926 the management committee took a decision to accept its first group of orphans. In this group was the most recent past President of the Aryan Benevolent Home Shishupal Rambharos who stated, 'In 1927, when I was seven years of age I was admitted, together with my invalid mother, and mentally handicapped brother. This occurred after the death of my father when we lived in Gillitts. I can't remember having any close family members.' ⁶⁹

The Durban Indian Child Welfare

In 1927 another organization was established to assist the 'workless, women and children suffering from want' this was the Durban Indian Child Welfare Society.⁷⁰ The society was formed when the Durban Indian Women's Organisation invited a visitor from India to speak at one of their functions. The speaker was Mrs Stanford, an Honorary Magistrate of the Presidency of Madras. The meeting was held in the M.K. Gandhi Library in Queen Street, Durban, on 23 July 1927. The subject of the talk was 'Child Welfare Societies in India' and in the course of her address, Mrs Stanford appealed to the members of the Durban Indian Women's Association to launch a 'Child Welfare Scheme'.

69. Interview: S. Rambharos, President of the Aryan Benevolent Home, 10 June 1996.

70. Aryan Benevolent Home Eightieth Anniversary Brochure, 1993, p.12.

This was in the light of the destitution she saw during her visits to the 'Indian' areas of Durban. The suggestion was warmly received and Mrs Moodalay was unanimously elected the first chairman of the Society. The constitution of the Society stated that its aims were to:

- promote the well being of the Indian children of the town and district of Durban;
- give effect to the provisions of the Children's Protection Act; to promote the physical and moral welfare of children;
- investigate and deal with cases of poverty, neglect, crime and mental deficiency amongst or affecting Indian children
- co-operate with other bodies or institutions whose aims were similar.⁷¹

The Child Welfare Society was situated at 137 Victoria Street, Durban. During the first ten days of September 1927 'twenty children attended and received attention'. The Society functioned on the altruistic gestures of the community. For instance, Mrs McNally, a member of the Society collected 'two enamel jugs, two enamel basins, three pairs of towels etc': these were essentials that were required to assist children. The Natal Indian Congress (NIC) also made financial contributions. In 1928 they made an initial donation of fifteen pounds to the Society. In later years the NIC increased its financial contributions. Between September 1927 and August 1928, 1378 cases were handled at the Society, most were ear, nose and throat, eye and skin complaints. This indicates that there was a demand for assistance of Indian children and that the municipality was not eager in making provision available.⁷²

71. The Durban Indian Child Welfare, Fiftieth Anniversary Brochure, p.4.

72. Durban Indian Child Welfare Commemorative Brochure, 1952, pp.1-5.

The premises from which the Society was operating were inadequate and unsuitable and the rent charged was substantial. In 1929, the Society wrote to the municipality suggesting that the municipality give, free of rent, the use of the cottage formerly occupied by the caretaker of the 'Native Women's Hostel' in Brook Street, Durban. The Society received positive feedback, stating that the premises could be occupied in January 1930. The municipality provided a grant of thirty five pounds. Much of the financial resources of the Society came from donations. For example in 1927, Sir Kurma Reddi Agent General of the government of India in South Africa, gave ten pounds, Nurse Fernando, a qualified nurse, employed by the society gave thirty pounds and Mr Tyson (member of the public) gave twelve pounds. The largest expenditure was on salaries for the nurses. The society banked the rest of money and had a credit balance of fifty pounds at the end of 1929.⁷³ The society constantly appealed to the public at large for donations.

By the late 1920s, 2734 people were assisted by the society. The secretary reported that 'not only children from schools but children and babies from all parts of Durban come to the centre for help'.⁷⁴ Further, several cases of deserted and neglected wives and children received attention from the Society. A number of children were sent to foster parents after officials of the Society carried out the necessary preliminary investigations. The ravages of the Great Depression saw the Society dealing with a number of desertions, destitutes, adoptions, support of children of separated couples, illegitimate children, complaints of ill-treatment of wives by husbands.

73. Durban Indian Child Welfare, Fiftieth Anniversary Brochure, 1977, pp.1-2.

74. Minutes of the meeting of the Durban Indian Child Welfare Society, 3 March 1929.

At a meeting held in December 1929, an important question was raised, concerning the minimum marriageable age of Indian children that had been fixed at 13 years for girls and 15 years for boys, under the Immigration Laws. It was not uncommon for girls under the age of 13 years to be given and received in marriage. This situation was perpetuated among families in Durban, because it was a tradition that prevailed in India. The unacceptable proliferation of 'child brides' in Durban was largely due to government policy, a lack of education and the circumstances under which people lived.⁷⁵ Whether Indian children lived on the streets of Durban is difficult to ascertain. However the initiatives driven mainly by the community obviated Indian children seeking refuge on the streets.⁷⁶

African children

African migrants who lived in hostel accommodation provided by the municipality were also confronted by severe socio-economic problems. During the early 1900s African men had to leave their rural enclaves because they were forced by legislation to work as migrant labour or in other instances they had to seek employment to sustain a living. Men who migrated to cities like Durban were not allowed to bring their wives and children along. Hence the traditional extended family life that was practiced generally in the rural areas soon reached its demise. On arrival in the city men were accommodated in single sex hostels.

75. K. Kailas: Memorandum on Indian Education in Natal. For Indian Education Enquiry Commission, 1928.

76. The Durban Indian Child Welfare Fiftieth Anniversary Brochure, pp.8-10.

In spite of the municipality's by-laws, women and children joined their husbands and fathers in the city. Although women were not employed in the formal economy, they brewed beer, which they sold to men. The municipality did not view this favourably as it ate into the profits of the municipality's beer halls. Some men and women were involved in casual relationships, which led to the birth of illegitimate children.⁷⁷ It is apparent that the experiences of Africans in early twentieth century Durban were exceptionally difficult, the lack of jobs, housing segregationist policies, all contributed to destitution. This invariably affected children.

The outbreak of World War One led to industrial growth, which resulted in a corresponding enlargement of the working class. However as the end of the war approached, the economic position of African workers became more and more difficult. Prices of commodities began to rise steeply after 1917 and this trend continued well after the war. While white workers were well organized in forming trade unions and demanded wages that were in keeping with inflation, Africans on the other hand saw a deterioration in their living standards. This was in addition to the evils of the pass laws, the job colour bar and the union government's general racist rule. The economic hardships led to an upsurge of organized resistance.

After the 1920s a worldwide economic depression was experienced. This brought hardship for both white and black workers. The prices of most products decreased dramatically. For example, the gold price fell almost 30% by 1922.⁷⁸

77. KCAL, Webb Papers, file 6.

78. Pampallis: The Foundations of the New South Africa, pp.138-139.

The prices of manufactured goods also decreased substantially, placing industries under severe financial strain. Many industries faced closure and a number of workers were retrenched. This led to a sharp rise in unemployment and workers struggled despite the fall in the prices of consumer goods.⁷⁹

Africans living in the 'reserves' (designated areas for African occupation that were situated away from the city) also experienced severe economic problems and Webb contends that this contributed to the breakdown of the tribal system.⁸⁰ In the face of burgeoning economic and social problems the tribal family began to disintegrate. Many children were forced to move towards the city to escape the poverty and to search for employment. In 1920, a number of African boys were taken to court for loitering in the streets of Durban and charged for theft and vagrancy. The magistrate M.G. Fannin usually cautioned and discharged them, only to find that they resorted to the same 'crimes'. Webb found that most of them came from the 'reserves' and had no fixed place of abode. This is evidence that these boys were actually destitute children with no home to go to. They therefore sought refuge on the streets of Durban, sleeping in backyards, in doorways and even in drain pipes. According to the court records it was estimated that a few hundred children lived on the streets of Durban.

This prompted Webb and a few white lawyers like Shepstone, Fannin and Millar to establish institutional care in an attempt to assist these indigent boys.⁸¹ Webb decided to

79. Ibid, pp.110-111.

80. KCAL, Webb Papers, file 2.

81. Webb: 'The Colour of Your Skin', (unpublished manuscript), Chapter V.

hold discussions with the Minister of Education, J.H. Hofmeyer, to rectify the appalling situation, which Africans found themselves in. By 1921, after discussions, the government promised funding for the establishment of a series of hostels and not just a single large hostel. Webb made several pleas for financial assistance; a number of organisations including the Rotary Club contributed generously.⁸²

The next step taken by Webb and his supporters was to establish an abode for indigent children. The home of a retired Durban magistrate was used. This later became known as the Brandon Bantu Hostel, which opened its doors in 1921.⁸³ The first group of six boy children was sent to the hostel after the magistrate established that they roamed the streets aimlessly and were involved in petty criminality. The hostel was always full. Several requests to house indigent children from distant places were turned down because the governing body decided to only accept children from the Durban court. According to Webb, the boys were well behaved, but some boys ran away, got arrested for theft and were returned to the hostel by the police. The hostel survived financially with donations from businesses and most of the care –givers worked entirely on a voluntary basis. In the light of increasing economic woes in the 1920s the incidence of indigent children seeking assistance grew rapidly. The municipality did little to assist the situation.⁸⁴

By 1925, it was reported by J. Millar (then Probation Officer for indigent children) that there were a number of African girls living on the streets of Durban. Owing to the lack of

82. KCAL, Webb Papers, file 2.

83. Ibid.

84. Webb: 'The Colour of Your Skin', Chapter V.

funds and an indifferent attitude of the municipality, very little could be done for girl children. Webb argues that there was an assumption that African boys and girls still lived on the streets. This was an unsavoury situation, which the municipality made no attempt at addressing, because it involved African children. The standard response with regard to indigent children was to 'give these children a whipping and send them back to their kraals', a symptomatic response which did very little to solve the problem of indigency.⁸⁵

The African population in Durban in the early 1900s continued to be largely male, overwhelmingly migrant with very little commitment to the colonial economy.⁸⁶ The issue of African indigent children persisted without any feasible solutions being offered by, the municipality.

Conclusion

Durban in the twentieth century rapidly developed into Natal's largest city, with whites, Indians and Africans playing an integral role in contributing to its economy. With industrialization, the need for space became increasingly urgent. Whites benefited most from the process of industrialization, and the municipality assisted their development, both economically and socially. By 1920 the notorious 'Durban System' was firmly in place and relegated Africans to the lower end of the racial hierarchy. The municipality, which ensured that African labour remained cheap and 'loyal', vigorously supported the

85. Ibid.

86. B. Freund: Insiders and Outsiders, p.38.

migrant labour system, and secondly migrancy favoured the retardation of permanent African urbanization. For the municipality a migrant labour force was cheaper to administer and control than an urbanized one.

By the 1920s the need for labour intensified but the municipality did very little for the provision of homes for African and Indian workers. Homelessness became a huge problem.

When Hertzog came to power in 1924, his exclusive racial policies impacted severely on Durban's. Unemployment soared, poverty became endemic and destitution was rife. This affected mainly African and Indian families. The municipality did very little to assist with the 'native and Indian problem' and when African and Indian children first appeared on the streets of Durban, the municipal police harassed them and often imprisoned them.

In response, wealthy merchant class Indians set up a home to assist the destitute. African children continued to seek refuge on the streets. It was only through the endeavours of white philanthropists who took the initiative to set up institutional care for African indigent children, such as the Brandon Bantu Hostel. This was the discrepancy between the white and African child.

The plight of the indigent child was further exacerbated in the 1930s with the onslaught of a worldwide economic depression. The impact of the depression on indigent children will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

INDIGENT CHILDREN IN DURBAN IN THE 1930s

This chapter will focus on the 1929 depression and its impact on the indigent children of Durban. In addition, the role of government and other agencies in setting up institutional care for indigent children under the conditions of extreme social distress, which characterised the depression, will be examined.

The 1929 depression

Mitchell defines the Great Depression as:

A slump or decline in the demand for goods, which began with overproduction and consequently led to falling prices. The Great Depression of 1929 - 1933 was a worldwide economic decline worsened by the general financial collapse of the New York (Wall Street) stock market. Such circumstances led to unemployment and mass poverty for the majority of the people.¹

According to Edley's study on the depression, South Africa was characterised by deepening social problems during the 1930s. Durban did not escape these effects.² Some of the more acute problems were unemployment, poverty, vagrancy, homelessness and destitution.

A major factor that impacted negatively on the nuclear family and on indigent children, was the high rate of unemployment. The vast disparities in the economic and political status of the various racial groups necessitate an analysis of unemployment based on race.³

1. B. Mitchell: Depression Decade (New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1969), p.15.

2. D.W.M. Edley: 'Population, poverty and politics: A study of some aspects of the depression in Greater Durban, 1929-1933', MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1983, pp.33-35.

3. The Natal Mercury, 12 April 1930. The Natal Mercury was prejudiced towards the interests of the white petit bourgeoisie. Views expressed in this newspaper reflected those of its readership.

These disparities derive their historic legacies from colonialism and were further exacerbated by racist legislation enacted by Union governments subsequent to 1910.⁴

The effects of the Depression

Whites

In the subsequent discussion, the impact of the depression on the different races will be examined. According to Pampallis, by 1929, there were approximately 42% whites, 39% Africans⁵, 14% Coloureds and 5% Indians living in Durban and its immediate environs.⁶ Ravenscroft argues that the industrial sector was most affected at the beginning of the depression and in the greater Durban area alone approximately 8 000 people were unemployed.⁷

The white population group in the Union of South Africa was treated differently to the other racial groups. This was attributed to the racial policies entrenched by Hertzog's Pact government and legislation which specifically favoured whites. The Natal Mercury noted that by December 1929, there were 700 whites unemployed in Durban alone, however, by June 1930 this figure increased to 2561. Unemployment peaked in February 1931, and 3472 whites were registered as unemployed at the Local Office of the Department of Labour.⁸ The Natal Mercury estimated that in October 1932 approximately 70 white families arrived in Durban on a monthly basis from the rural hinterlands of Natal.⁹ They sought any form of employment or government assistance.

4. D. Oakes (ed.): Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa, The real story (Cape Town, Reader's Digest Association South Africa (Pty) Ltd, 1992), pp.332-333.

5. The actual number of urban Africans must have been higher than indicated by these figures, as many Africans who were in the cities 'illegally' were not recorded by the census. This was due largely to the pass laws and the migrant labour system.

6. Pampallis: Foundations of the New South Africa, pp.141 –142.

7. A. P. Ravenscroft: 'The Course of the Depression In South Africa', M. Comm. thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1940, p.52.

8. The Natal Mercury, 20 January 1930.

9. *Ibid*, 15 October 1932.

However, white Durbanites pressurised the municipality to implement stringent measures to halt this migration. In response, a deliberate policy was put into place that gave white Durbanites preference over those unemployed from other parts of the country. Edley explains that the organisations catering for the white unemployed began imposing a residential qualification as a requirement for assistance.¹⁰ Furthermore the Durban Employment Bureau followed the policy outlined by the municipality. They only assisted those white unemployed who had resided in Durban for a minimum of three years prior to their application for assistance. The implementation of these measures did not curb the white unemployed from entering Durban.

In response to white unemployment, Hertzog's government established an Unemployment Investigation Committee, which made its findings known in October 1932.¹¹ One of its fundamental recommendations was the establishment of relief works, 'We consider that public relief, being intended to relieve distress only among the able - bodied, should take the form of relief works, conducted strictly on the principle that assistance is only given in return for work done. Relief work should not be a method of dispensing charity.'¹² The committee also recommended that municipalities should assist the government by providing work for unemployed whites in permanent municipal employment.

By January 1933 approximately 5 952 white workers were given employment on relief works in Durban and this figure increased by 5 606 in December 1933.¹³ A combination of economic growth and discriminatory labour policies created many new jobs for whites.

10. Edley: 'Population, poverty and politics', p.39.

11. Report of the Unemployment Investigation Committee, U.G. 30 of 1932.

12. Ibid.

13. Report of the Unemployment Investigation Committee, U.G. 30 of 1932.

This eased the 'poor white problem' during the 1930s and served to reduce child indigency in the greater Durban area.

Indians

Mabel Palmer's study indicates that Indians were also adversely affected by the spectre of unemployment.¹⁴ With the closure of factories and mass scale retrenchments many unemployed Indians had to resort to seeking odd jobs, mainly available in the hotel industry.¹⁵ Dr G. Goonam, South Africa's first Indian woman medical doctor who returned to South Africa from her sojourn in **Edinburgh** at the height of the depression, chronicles the hardship of Indian life in Durban in her autobiography Coolie Doctor 'During my home visits, I discovered the depth of Indian poverty. The staple diet was mealie rice, dhol (beans), herbs, potatoes and pickles. Protein was sadly lacking, meat, fish and chicken beyond their reach'.¹⁶

In 1936 the per capita income of Indians in the agricultural sector of Natal was about 35 pounds per annum, while in industry the per capita wage for Indians was 57 pounds.¹⁷ Freund argues that the contemporary idea that the Indian wage earner formed an intermediary stratum between white and black workers was inappropriate for the period prior to World War Two, since most Indians were regarded as unskilled labour and did not enjoy better wages than their African counterparts.¹⁸ Katzen states that wages per annum for Indian workers averaged 52 pounds in 1924/25, 68 pounds in 1929/30 and 63 pounds in 1934/35.¹⁹

14. The Natal Mercury, 9 December 1931.

15. Ibid.

16. G. Goonam: Coolie Doctor (Durban, Madiba Publishers, 1991), p.60.

17. Race Relations News, November 1938.

18. Freund: Insiders and Outsiders, p.40.

19. Katzen: Industry in Greater Durban, p.25.

This compares with 39 pounds in 1924/25, 43 pounds in 1929/30 and 43 pounds in 1934/35 for Africans. These statistics reveal that differences did exist and even widened, during the 1920s. On the other hand, white wages during this period were calculated at 238 pounds, 240 and 201 pounds during the same period, respectively.²⁰ These statistics conclusively show that Indian and African families were more severely challenged by the economic woes of the depression than White families. A survey undertaken by the Institute of Race Relations in the 1930 revealed that the average Indian family contained 6,96 people compared to 3,96 Africans and 3,39 Whites.²¹ It was under these poverty stricken conditions that Indian families had to sustain a life during the depression.

Africans

Africans occupied the lowest rung of the labour market and as such became the most vulnerable to dismissal and wage cuts. The hostel-dwelling migrants were further affected because they lacked the family support systems in the urban areas that the urban Indian and white proletariat enjoyed. Drought and epidemics in the Natal interior compounded the economic pressures on Durban's migrants, who were unable to provide food for their families. Rural crises increased the flow of work seekers into Durban placing further downward pressure on African wage levels.²²

According to Katzen, 5000 Africans lost their jobs in Durban between 1929 and 1933. Private manufacturing firms alone shed 3150 African workers between 1930 and 1933, affecting one out of every three Africans employed in this sector.²³ In her study, Ginwala asserts that all race groups felt the effects of the depression but to an unequal degree.

20. Ibid, pp.25-26.

21. Race Relations Handbook, 1930, p.26.

22. Oakes: Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa, pp.354-355.

23. Katzen: Industry in Greater Durban, p. 159.

The massive drop of 18% in the number of Africans and Indians working in factories in Durban, but on the other hand, white employment fell by 2%.²⁴

Hertzog's Pact Government passed a number of pieces of racist legislation, one of the more notorious was the Mines and Works Act (Colour Bar) of 1926, which caused immense hardship among African workers. Tens of thousands of Africans employed in state departments, for example, the railways, lost their jobs and were replaced by so called 'poor whites' who were paid 'civilized' rates of pay.²⁵ Pampallis states that these rates of pay, according to the Department of Labour, would maintain 'persons whose standard of living conforms to the standard of living generally recognized as tolerable from the usual European standpoint'. 'Uncivilised labour', on the other hand was defined as 'persons whose aim is restricted to the bare requirements of the necessities of life as understood among barbarous and underdeveloped peoples.'²⁶

In keeping with the government's policy, a growing number of proletarianised whites gradually replaced black workers in several government departments. The railway industry became a white Afrikaner preserve.²⁷ By 1932, the railway department was ordered to retire or retrench African and Indian workers who were 50 years or older or whose health prejudiced their efficiency. Government officials were also asked to dismiss those Africans who refused to accept a wage cut and substituted 'poor whites' wherever it was possible to do so without incurring extra costs.²⁸

24. F. N. Ginwala: 'Class Consciousness and Control: Indian South Africans, 1860-1946', D. Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1974, p.336.

25. Pampallis: Foundations of the New South Africa, p.127. 'Civilized' wages was paid according to the Department of Labour's policy, which stated that a particular standard of living should be maintained amongst whites and this should conform to those set in European countries.

26. Ibid, pp.127-128.

27. Parsons: A New History of Southern Africa, p.246.

28. J. and R. Simons: Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950 (London, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1983), p.455.

For Africans living in the rural areas, land dispossession, overcrowding, high taxation and the loss of young people to the cities led to a continuation of the trend towards increased starvation, disease and high infant mortality rates. Poverty and economic necessity drove people out of the rural environs to sell their labour in urban centres where opportunities for employment were greater and remuneration higher. Home life broke down and social problems increased as families were split by the migrant labour system.²⁹ The combination of these economic pressures resulted in the disintegration of normally stable family units, which was also experienced by Africans resident in Durban.

The impact of the depression on children

Generally the concept of stable family units amongst all racial groups began to systematically collapse especially after the 1930s because of the economic and social pressures emanating from the depression. This was most prevalent among Durban's impoverished.³⁰

Social crises under these austere conditions peaked, as issues of insolvency, family violence, abandonment and high degrees of poverty served to advance the disintegration of families. Families that depended on charity and the goodwill of others were greatly burdened. However, it must be borne in mind that the Great Depression was a cataclysmic phenomenon, which contributed to historico - social stresses already prevalent in these deprived communities.

It is important to note that research on the depression, undertaken by Edley, has not focused its findings on how children were affected. This study will endeavour to establish

29. M.Swanson: 'The Durban System': roots of urban apartheid in colonial Natal, Journal of African Studies, vol.35, (1978), pp.159-176.

30. Nuttall: 'Class, Race and Nation', p.143.

the effects of the depression on children who were most vulnerable during this period. In each case (white, African and Indian) attempts were made by various organisations to assist indigent children. The most significant of these will be discussed in this chapter.

It was reported regularly in The Natal Mercury that children of unemployed parents experienced enormous economic problems.³¹ This resulted in women and children seeking employment. This suited industrialists, 'as they were paid less and were more productive than male workers'.³²

White children

Some white children were sent to work by parents. This was largely possible because of the province of Natal's lower school-leaving age as compared to any of the other provinces. A white child in Natal could leave school when he or she was fifteen years old or alternately had passed standard six, that is, at thirteen years old.³³

The Chairperson of the Juvenile Affairs Board, B.M. Narbeath stated that white children could be withdrawn from schooling at an earlier age if, according to him, the family was in indigent circumstances and needed the wages earned by children.³⁴

According to The Natal Mercury, such loopholes in the law gave parents the opportunity to remove their children from school before they acquired the minimum level of education. This affected white children negatively because they were not given a chance to obtain suitable employment later in their lives.³⁵

31. The Natal Mercury, 9 March 1932.

32. J. Robinson: Essays in the theory of unemployment (London, MacMillan and Company, 1937), pp.12-14.

33. Natal Education Commission, 1937, pp.330-331.

34. The Natal Mercury, 9 March 1932.

35. *Ibid.*

Most white children worked either in the textile or hotel industry in order to supplement the incomes of their families. Wages were low and working hours long.³⁶

Unemployment among white juveniles decreased during the month of December 1929. There were 138 juveniles registered with the Juvenile Affairs Board but by February 1930 this number increased to 386.³⁷ This scenario was typical throughout the depression years. To cite another example, in December 1931 there were 531 registered juveniles and by March 1932 this figure increased to 868.³⁸ One of the reasons for a decrease in unemployment during this period was the increased demand for juvenile labour during the Christmas vacation period. Narbeath also suggests that unemployment among white juveniles in Durban increased as a result of the influx of juveniles. According to The Natal Mercury in 1933, 'The influx has an important bearing on both adult and juvenile unemployment in Durban. The drift to the towns is a big question ... it is usually difficult to find work in Durban. These juveniles are frequently unadapted to town life and are backward educationally, thus constituting the most difficult part of our unemployment problem.'³⁹ The Durban municipality appointed a special sub – committee to inquire into the methods it could use to assist in the alleviation of the high rate of white juvenile unemployment. This committee reported that 51 youths could be absorbed into municipal service, but that this would mean replacing 27 Indian workers. The municipality approved these measures on condition that the Indian that was replaced would not be dismissed, but transferred. These youths were to become permanent employees and not relief workers.⁴⁰

36. The Natal Mercury, 9 March 1932.

37. *Ibid*, 27 April 1931.

38. *Ibid*, 18 March 1932.

39. *Ibid*, October 1933.

40. *Ibid*, 18 March 1932.

In December 1931, 8.4 per thousand head of the white population were unemployed juveniles. This situation improved by late 1933 when the rate per 1000 in Durban was reduced to 7.3 because the depression began to lift.⁴¹

The Natal Provincial Administration (N.P.A.) contributed a sum of approximately 97 265 pounds to recognized charitable organizations between 1929 and 1934, in an attempt to alleviate juvenile unemployment.⁴² While the Durban municipality was able to increase its subsidy to charitable organisations, their contribution began to decline. This was because it was concerned with the eradication of other social problems in the greater Durban area. However, between the period 1928 and 1934 both the N.P.A. and the municipality contributed 274 873 pounds to white charitable organisations.⁴³

The Durban municipal authorities and other social agencies made efforts to assist indigent children. The Natal Mercury noted that behind each project there were adults, young people and even adolescents who courageously and confidently gave of their time to indigent children. They did so with optimism, knowing that they may have a determining influence on the future of numerous youngsters.⁴⁴

The Durban Benevolent Society

The organisation that received a large proportion of the funds was the Durban Benevolent Society that was established in 1885. The society functioned on generous donations from street collections and grants from the N.P.A. and the municipality. White people who had resided in Durban for a two-year period were eligible for assistance from the Benevolent Society.

41. Minutes of the Council in committee, 24 April 1932.

42. Annual Reports of the Municipal Auditor, 1934.

43. The Natal Mercury, 8 October 1934.

44. *Ibid.* 27 April 1934.

This residential qualification was gradually increased to three years in 1932 and then to four years in 1933. By 1931 the Durban Benevolent Society assisted 41 042 white indigent people. Of this, some 15 200 were white children. The society incurred costs of 94 744 pounds. By 1932, the Society was servicing nearly 90 families per day.⁴⁵

The Community Chest

The Natal Mercury reported that there were 'white professional beggars, both men and women with ill clad children as stock in trade, who parade the suburbs, making appeals from door to door.'⁴⁶ This was an illustration of the extent of the impact of the depression in the greater Durban area. Many impoverished white households abused their circumstances and continued to plead for 'handouts'. It was against this background that the Community Chest was established in Durban and was officially opened on 1 January 1932. Its prime objective was to serve mainly the interests of white indigent families and broadly to co-ordinate the functions of charitable organizations in Durban. This helped in streamlining assistance for the indigent. Funds were received from the private sector. By February 1931, the Community Chest collected a sum of 15 000 pounds.

The subsequent table illustrates how the money collected was disbursed to various charitable organizations in and around Durban.⁴⁷

45. Ibid, 8 October 1932.

46. Ibid, 15 July 1930.

47. Ibid, 23 December 1931.

Institution	Pounds
Durban Benevolent Home and Aged Women's Home	7 500
Cambridge House	1 300
Durban District Nursing Association	700
Ethelbert Children's Home And Orphanage	1 035
Holiday Fund	450
Krantzkloof Convalescent Home	150
Lad's Hostel	250
Prisoner's Aid Society	150
St Aidan's Hospital	250
St Monica's Home for Coloured Children	160
Seamen's Institute and Rest Home	800
St Theresa's Orphanage for Coloured Boys	300
Durban Unemployed Organization	800
Emergency	<u>1 155</u>
	15 000

48

The above institutions were directly involved in the amelioration of people's material conditions. Some charitable organisations, under the supervision of the Community Chest, still experienced financial difficulties. This was largely due to the unequal distribution of funds. For example, the financial contribution made to the Lad's Hostel and the St. Monica's Home for Coloured children was far short of the required amount needed by these organisations to carry out their general operations. Since these institutions were black, they were not permitted to undertake street collections and had to rely on voluntary donations.⁴⁹

By 1934 the number of affiliated charitable institutions increased to 26 and the

48. Ibid, 1 February 1931.

49. Ibid, 1 March 1932.

Community Chest's budget rose to 20 000 pounds per annum.⁵⁰ Although the Community Chest made efforts to co-ordinate the functions of charitable organizations, some black institutions were reluctant to affiliate. They felt that the funds collected were inequitably distributed. Some charities therefore used this loophole to establish their own organizations.

Indian children

Owing to the lack of funding from the municipal authorities, the Indian community decided to establish charitable organizations for their people. The sole purpose of these organisations was to assist indigent Indian families. In 1930, the Rt. Hon. V.S. Strinivasa Sastri, the first Agent-General of the government of India to the Union of South Africa, established the Indian Social Service Committee.⁵¹ The main aim of this organization was to assist infirm and indigent Indian families. In 1931, V. Lawrence, a community worker, was elected vice-chairman of the organization. He continued with the work of the organization and assisted people who needed homes and health care.⁵²

Sir Kurma Reddi, who succeeded Sastri as Agent-General in 1931, launched a relief fund to assist indigent Indian families affected by the depression.⁵³ The relief fund committee organized soup kitchens, providing approximately 133 000 meals during its first year of existence. Nearly 300 indigent people were fed per day. This did a lot to alleviate the poverty prevalent in the Indian community.⁵⁴

50. Ibid, 23 November 1932.

51. Durban Indian Child Welfare, Golden Jubilee Commemorative Brochure, 1977, p.3.

52. The Natal Mercury, 18 November 1932.

53. Ibid, 7 July 1932.

54. Ibid.

Furthermore, in 1931, Mabel Palmer undertook an enquiry into the effects of the depression on Indian children.⁵⁵ The poverty that many Indian families experienced manifested itself in the health of Indian children who 'were often weak, undernourished and under weight'.⁵⁶

The Durban Indian Child Welfare⁵⁷

The Durban Indian Child Welfare also helped children who were caught in the backwash of the depression of the early thirties. It was reported at its third annual general meeting in 1930 that children, expectant mothers and babies from all parts of Durban arrived at its clinic and child welfare centre in Brook Street for attention. Twenty-four expectant mothers, seventeen midwifery cases and several neglected and deserted wives and children were assisted by the society. In the same year, a number of Indian children were adopted by foster parents after officials of the Society had carried out the necessary preliminary investigations and submitted reports.⁵⁸

At the fourth annual general meeting of the Society in November 1931, the secretary reported on the impact of poverty on Indian families as a result of the depression and stated, 'The unemployment among our people is acute, thousands are workless, consequently women and children are suffering the most from want.'⁵⁹ The Secretary went on to say that the society was devoting much of its time and energy to maternity cases, desertions, destitutes, adoptions, support of children of separated couples, illegitimate children, orphans and complaints of ill-treatment of wives by husbands.⁶⁰

55. Ibid, 9 December 1931.

56. R. Burrows: Indian Life and Labour in Natal (New Africa Pamphlet, no. 23, revised ed. Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1952).

57. Refer to chapter two for introductory comments on this organization.

58. The Durban Indian Child Welfare, Golden Jubilee Commemorative Brochure, 1977, p.7.

59. Ibid, pp.8-9.

60. Ibid, pp.9-10.

With the effects of the depression taking its toll, the Durban Indian Child Welfare Society decided to revise its constitution in 1932, in order to cater for a broader range of issues affecting the Indian population. Its objectives were defined as follows,

‘To protect the interests and to promote the well being of Indian children of the town and district of Durban; to cause effect to be given to the Children’s Protection Act; to promote the physical and moral welfare of the children; to investigate and deal with cases of poverty, neglect, crime and mental deficiency amongst or affecting Indian children and to co-operate with other bodies or institutions whose aims were similar.’⁶¹

After 1935, the Society decided to concentrate on school children, because of the poverty and malnutrition that they experienced. Clinics were opened in Clairwood and Umgeni in April 1936 and in Mayville in September 1936. These three clinics were in addition to the clinic that the society was maintaining at Magazine Barracks. More people thus began taking an interest in the Society, especially Indian men who slowly began outnumbering the women in the organisation.⁶² The clinics conducted at Umgeni and Clairwood were closed in 1939 when the R.K. Khan Hospital and Dispensary Trust opened dispensaries in these places. The Society continued, however, to provide relief in the form of baby food and groceries, to families of mainly indigent children.⁶³ Financially, the Society was dependent on donations from the community and the generosity of benefactors like W. Leuchers who, in December 1935, donated 250 pounds to the Society for the purposes of easing the distress of indigent Indian women, children and the elderly. In 1936, the Society became an affiliate of the Durban and District Community Chest receiving a first grant of 150 pounds. Over the years, the Community Chest was the Society’s main source of financial assistance.⁶⁴

61. *The Durban Indian Child Welfare, Golden Jubilee Commemorative Brochure*, 1977, p. 9.

62. Freund: *Insiders and Outsiders*, p.12.

63. *The Durban Indian Child Welfare, Golden Jubilee Commemorative Brochure*, 1977, p.14.

64. *Ibid*, p.12.

In the years following the depression and preceding World War II, the increase in the number of indigent children in the Indian community prompted the secretary of the Society to declare the following in her annual report of 1939:

We make an appeal to all who can give in kind and to those who can render services to help the needy children in our community. The low rates of wages, unemployment, exclusion from free education and other benefits which Europeans receive, bad housing, all these and other causes make for the malnutrition of the children who have to enter life with handicaps, with the result that our community is retarded in its progress and development. We are, however, grateful that there is a growing consciousness for the need to do more for our children and we hope that as time goes on we shall see that the children benefit more and more.⁶⁵

The establishment of Child Welfare Societies spread to Northern Natal towns like Newcastle, Dundee and Dannhauser and to the North Coast and Pietermaritzburg as there was a dire need in those areas too, by those burdened by the poverty of the depression years.⁶⁶

The M.A.Motala Indian Lads' Hostel

With inadequate jobs, wages, housing and inactive social agencies, juvenile vagrancy and delinquency among Indian children continued to prevail in Durban. According to The Natal Mercury, 'the Judge President, on 10 November 1937 at the Circuit Court, Durban, referred to the great need for a hostel when he sentenced an Indian lad to imprisonment. If this hostel had been in existence he would have sent him there instead of to prison.'⁶⁷

65. Ibid, p.14.

66. Ibid, pp.15-16.

67. The Natal Mercury, 18 March 1940.

This prompted M.G. Fannin, Chief magistrate of Pinetown and J. Millar to establish a lads' hostel. After several requests via the local media for premises to house indigent Indian boys, M.A. Motala, an Indian merchant of Durban donated a house and six acres of land. It was located in Wyebank, about 8 kilometres from Pinetown on the ridge overlooking the Molweni Valley and in view of the sea and the Umgeni River.⁶⁸ On obtaining the house and land, the institution was certified by the Minister of Social Welfare, W.B. Madeley under Section 39 of the Children's Act No 31 of 1937 by Government Notice No. 507 on 14 April 1939. The following people were elected as executive members to govern the lads' hostel: M.G. Fannin, (Chairman), E.F. Wilcox, attorney (Vice Chairman), M.K. Naidoo, headmaster (Secretary) and N.D. Joshua, clerk (Treasurer).⁶⁹

The institution opened on 26 November 1939 and was referred to as The M.A. Motala Indian Lads' Hostel. The hostel was to be used explicitly for the reception, maintenance and training of Indian lads up to the age of 15 in need of care. Eleven boys initially occupied the premises, which catered for twenty. It was the only hostel for Indian indigent lads in the Union of South Africa. Prior to this, Indian boys who were charged with vagrancy were either committed back to the care of their parents or sent to prison or the Diepkloof reformatory.⁷⁰ Boys who stayed at the hostel were given a basic education. In addition, they were trained in small farming and market gardening. This was the first Indian welfare initiative that the Department of Social Welfare supported financially. There was a monthly subsidy of two shillings per day per lad for all inmates committed to the hostel. Other sources of income were generated from the protector of Indian Immigrants, the Durban Community Chest and donations.⁷¹

68. The Durban Indian Documentation and Cultural Centre (DC), Motala Lads' Hostel File, Minutes of a meeting of the Motala Indian Lads' Hostel, 9 December 1939.

69. The Natal Mercury, 17 April 1940.

70. *Ibid*, 18 March 1941.

71. Minutes of a meeting of the Motala Lads' Hostel, 13 March 1941.

Although The Motala Lads' Hostel was established to rehabilitate boys, this form of social agency was inadequate to curb the issue of indigency and vagrancy. The Union government failed to create employment and make adequate social provisions for Indians, in order to overcome their social challenges.

African children

By 1932, destitute African families living in Durban were assisted with the provision of soup kitchens by the municipality. Only Africans who had passes to work and reside in the greater Durban area were eligible for assistance. Nearly 100 Africans per day were assisted.⁷² This form of discrimination had a negative impact on Africans who resided in Durban illegally.

Juvenile offenders - Diepkloof Reformatory

African children found many ways to supplement their families' income. They found jobs in offices and shops as messengers, or sweeping and cleaning, making tea or delivering milk. Other children got domestic work in the kitchens or gardens of houses in the white suburbs. Often they were tipped or given food by hawkers for help in getting customers. The children of the poor were always on the lookout for ways to make a few pennies.⁷³ When they could not find jobs, many children turned to begging, stealing and pickpocketing. Life in the ghetto taught children to be independent and fend for themselves. From an early age they learnt to join in their parents' struggle to survive. The Durban municipal police made several successful 'raids' on children who roamed the streets.

72. The Natal Mercury, 7 July 1932.

73. L. Callinicos: Working Life, Vol. 2, Factories, townships and popular culture on the rand, 1886-1940 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987), p.232.

They were often detained in police cells for loitering after hours in white suburbs. This prompted Maurice Webb of the South African Institute of Race Relations, to spearhead an initiative to assist black children. In September 1934, after a number of African juveniles were prosecuted for vagrancy and juvenile delinquency in Durban, Webb launched a committee, which consisted of judges, social workers and educationists.⁷⁴ The committee later met with the Minister of Education, J.H. Hofmeyer, to request assistance for indigent black children. The minister responded that the government lacked the funds to provide an institution for black indigent children. He pointed out that there were existing institutions such as mission schools whose brief it was to protect, what he referred to as, 'native vagrants'. He further noted that indigent children who were 'not suited' to these welfare institutions should be re-directed to Diepkloof.⁷⁵

Diepkloof reformatory was established in 1934, after Parliament decided to transfer all reformatories from the Union Department of Prisons to the Union Department of Education. Diepkloof catered exclusively for African boys from throughout the Union of South Africa and was located in Johannesburg.⁷⁶ There was no institution of similar status in the greater Durban area. Therefore African boys who displayed serious behavioural problems were sent to Diepkloof. At Diepkloof, delinquent African children were required to work the land. On the other hand white children were sent to reformatories such as Tokai White and Houtpoort White, both of which were situated in the Cape. These reformatories had a structured programme in areas of trade, such as building, carpentry and cabinet making, metalwork, and painting.⁷⁷

74. KCAL, Webb Papers, file no. 3.

75. Ibid.

76. A. Paton: Diepkloof, Reflections of Diepkloof Reformatory (Cape Town, David Philip Publishers, 1986), p.2.

77. Ibid, pp.2-3.

Alan Paton was appointed as principal of Diepkloof in July 1935. In his autobiography he states that it was the most foul place that he had seen in his life. It was a wood and iron structure, set round a hollow square.⁷⁸ Under Paton, Diepkloof accommodated 400 boys whom lived in a block consisting of twenty rooms. It offered a prison - like environment for indigent children and was devoid of a home or school environment. Paton stated that the white teachers whom he first met were not prepared to change Diepkloof from a prison into a school environment.⁷⁹ The prevalence of this type of attitude did little to help African children.

Webb and his committee noted that committing African indigent children to places of safety such as Diepkloof, had a negative effect on their psyche. They further noted that magistrates were reluctant to sentence indigent African children to Diepkloof because some of the inmates were associated with criminal activities. Hence it was unjustified to isolate these children to a lifetime of deprivation. Later Webb and his committee decided to arrange accommodation for these destitute children.⁸⁰ The first was in Umtwalumi, and the other in Highflats, both situated in Southern Natal. These homes or places of safety served to nurture the interests of African children, who were taught life skills, trade and gardening.⁸¹ This meant that indigent children would not have to travel outside the province of Natal for accommodation. This form of caregiving was purposeful and served to rehabilitate indigent children and prevented them from living on the streets. Although indigent children were accommodated in these homes, they presented caregivers with special problems, for instance many of them came from broken homes and some experienced learning difficulties.⁸²

78. Ibid, pp.8-9.

79. Ibid, pp.12-14.

80. KCAL, Webb Papers, file 3.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

Webb and his committee conceded that although they made a concerted effort at assisting black children, they failed to eradicate the causes of the problems plaguing indigent children.

Webb's committee noted that the Durban municipality's policy towards white indigent children was different to the one for black children during the depression. In the case of white orphaned children or if a child was removed from his or her home because of unsuitability, every effort was made to make adequate social provision for such children. The same kind of enthusiasm was not forthcoming from the municipality for indigent African children. Some of the reasons attributed to this partisan behaviour was the 'illegality' of Africans frequenting the city of Durban and as such it was against government policy to assist Africans.⁸³

The Bantu⁸⁴ Child Welfare Society

Although Webb and his committee attempted to assist indigent children in Durban, their efforts were inadequate. As the depression deepened, there were still hundreds of African children loitering the streets of Durban in search of food and shelter. The Natal Mercury, reported that an increase in the number of indigent children was directly related to the paltry wages earned by African workers.⁸⁵ In 1935, the average wage, for an African worker in Durban was four pounds per month. However to feed a family of three cost five pounds per month.⁸⁶ Most African households were confronted with this anomalous situation.

83. Ibid.

84. The term Bantu referred to the language used by Africans for many decades. Generally 'Bantu' is no longer in use, because it has come to have negative, racist connotations.

85. The Natal Mercury, 20 February 1935.

86. Ibid.

Hence, both parents had to work in order to sustain a decent living. Consequently African children were left on their own and sometimes strayed into the city. Here they either worked as child labour or loitered the streets.⁸⁷ This created enormous pressure on children.

The plight of African children prompted the National Council of Women and the National Council of African Women, The Durban Child Welfare Society, members of the Institute of Race Relations and some Africans to act.⁸⁸ In 1936 the Durban municipality set up a separate welfare service for African children, known as the Durban Bantu Child Welfare Society.⁸⁹ The fusion government's segregatory policies ensured that this institution only admitted African children. Children from the age of eight years were accepted. The Society's offices were housed initially at the African Women's Hostel in Grey Street. It later moved to an annexe at the Methodist Church Hall in Grey Street and thereafter relocated to the Bantu Municipal offices in Ordnance Road.

These offices had previously been used by the African police, also known as the 'Blackjack'. The organization finally relocated to offices in Walnut and Old Fort Roads.⁹⁰ The continuous movement of the offices of the Bantu Child Welfare Society was a clear indication of the municipality's lack of commitment to issues pertaining to African people. The society played a significant role in attending to the needs of the indigent African child, for example health, nutrition and personal hygiene.

87. KCAL, Webb Papers, file 4.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid, files 4 and 5.

90. Ibid.

Isabel Sililo, a social worker from Durban, headed the society. She worked tirelessly on a part-time basis, in liaison with the Durban Child Welfare, to help indigent African children. Later she was appointed the first secretary of the Society. On assuming duty in August 1936, she made an application for funding to the municipal authorities.⁹¹ On 4 November, the Society was informed that the application was 'duly considered by the Executive Committee at its last meeting when it was decided that you should be requested to make application to the Chief Native Commissioner for assistance and to advise this Department of the result'.⁹² Application was then made to the Chief Native Commissioner who replied on 2 December that 'no provision exists on the votes of this department for public services of this nature, and in the circumstances I regret I am unable to assist.' The municipality was duly informed of this 'result' but no grant had been made.⁹³ This was the policy of the Durban municipality to African affairs, although the irony was that they paid taxes to the municipality. Hence, the money generated to assist the Bantu Child Welfare came mainly from donations and honorariums.

In the first year of operation, with its meagre financial resources, the Society attended to approximately 600 indigent African children. Many of the children who came for assistance were emotionally distraught and required immediate attention.⁹⁴ The society made every effort within its power and resources to provide a homely environment for indigent children.

91. Webb: Some inter-racial aspects of poverty and poor relief in Durban, South African Institute of race relations, vol.V, no.1, February, 1938, pp.4-6.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Durban Child Welfare brochure, 1921, p.12.

The Baumanville Infants' Home

As unemployment amongst Africans increased, there was a corresponding increase in the number of indigent children. Webb reported that 689 African children were detained in the juvenile prison, in Durban, for loitering.⁹⁵ In response, Edith Benson, a member of the municipal council, who later became City Councillor, decided to make two small single cottages available at the Baumanville Location.⁹⁶

The Baumanville Location was a facility that housed African male workers. Workers supplied their labour to industries and government institutions in Durban. The depression brought about a reduction of staff. With fewer staff, more space became available. These cottages were situated near the Greyville shunting yards of the South African Railways. Benson was successful in securing two rooms and two kitchens. The ablution facility was located outside the building. These premises initially accommodated only twelve indigent African children.⁹⁷ This was insignificant in terms of the number of children that required accommodation.

The inadequate facilities at the Baumanville Home prompted discussions with the municipality to provide new accommodation. Benson subsequently wrote to the municipality requesting bigger premises. After months of meetings, the municipality decided to commission the drawing of building plans for a new home.⁹⁸ Various sites were earmarked for development in African residential areas such as Lamont. The proposal to build a new home for indigent African children eventually was shelved because of the outbreak of World War Two in 1939.

95. Webb: Some inter-racial aspects of poverty and poor relief in Durban, p.7.

96. Durban Child Welfare, Golden Jubilee Brochure, 1968, p.12.

97. *Ibid.*

98. KCAL, Webb Papers, file 4.

Conclusion

Although several 'places of safety' were established during the 1930s to assist indigent children, many children rebelled against this system by running away or escaping and returning to the streets. Webb notes that in several instances indigent children left or ran away from places of safety. For example 'Beauty ran away from Highflats and went to live with some friends in Sydenham'.⁹⁹ She then came to Durban where she was arrested by police and sent to prison for loitering.

It is difficult to draw any conclusion from the above without undertaking a thorough research on why children left. However, it would appear that some of the reasons advanced by Barrette are valid, for example, 'the children's failure to identify with an institution; the artificial relationship existing between the children and the housefather/mother; the children's inability to feel part of the society to which they belonged and the lack of behaviour models in such institutions.' Furthermore, 'The prison-like restrictions of government institutions provoke resentment and instant resistance from children accustomed to the freedom of the street.'¹⁰⁰ According to Street Children need our care, 'there is no way a project or the government will ever have sufficient personnel and funds to cater adequately for the rehabilitation of indigent children. He continues to state that 'everyone shares some responsibility, and everybody is both part of the problem and of the solution, including street children, including us.... This approach on shared responsibility, both for the problem and for the solution, combines two extremes: on the one hand we are involved, on the other hand none of us should carry the problems of this world alone'.¹⁰¹ To successfully assist indigent children, any project should involve the participation of the children themselves and the community at large.

99. Ibid, file 3.

100. M.J. Barrette: Street Children need our care (Cape Town, Kagiso Publishers, 1995), p.83.

101. Ibid, pp.68-72.

The 1929 depression led to the scourge of unemployment, poverty and destitution. In all of this, children experienced the most trauma. The Durban municipality made profound endeavours to assist its white electorate with the provision of social grants for adults and places of safety for white indigent children. This type of assistance was not made readily available to the African and Indian inhabitants of the city. The municipality indicated that the availability of limited financial resources precluded it from assisting all of the city's people equally. However by the mid 1930s it began to make small contributions to African and Indian child welfare societies. White philanthropists like Webb and others made invaluable contributions by establishing places of safety for both African and Indian indigent children. This helped alleviate the number of indigent children that roamed the streets of Durban and faced imprisonment for delinquency.

The subsequent chapter will focus on the effects of segregatory legislation up to the end of World War Two in 1945.

CHAPTER FOUR

INDIGENCE IN THE 1940s

Although the depression led to the rise of indigency in the 1930s, the implementation of segregatory legislation actually compounded it. This chapter will focus on the impact of urban apartheid in the turbulent years of World War Two and its concomitant effects on indigent children. Particular focus will be given to the Overport Detention Barracks.

World War Two

The outbreak of World War Two in 1939 saw a split in white politics. The United Party leaders, Hertzog and Smuts, differed fundamentally on the path South Africa should take, concerning the World War. Smuts was of the view that South Africa should join Britain and declare war on Germany. Hertzog and his followers, who were pro-Nazi supporters had no desire to participate on the side of Britain. Hertzog was eventually forced to resign and Smuts became Prime Minister on 4 September 1939.¹

The Union defence force called for volunteers to join the war effort. The National Party opposed any South African participation in the war. It also conducted a campaign against the recruitment of blacks into the armed forces. Smuts' government rejected their demands and approximately 120 000 African and other 'non – European' races joined the war effort with full citizenship, which included participating in the defence system on equal terms. Durban's white male residents between 18 and 40 years volunteered their services to the South African army on the side of the Allied forces.²

1. Pampallis: Foundations of the New South Africa, p.152.

2. Ibid, p.155.

South Africa's participation in the war impacted negatively on families across racial lines. In most instances women, children and the aged were responsible for the day to day activities of the home, namely income generation, home keeping and other related responsibilities. Conversely, the war served to expand South Africa's economy in the 1930s. A discussion of this will follow.

Economic development

The outbreak of the war led to the growth of Durban's manufacturing sector. The metal and engineering industry increased its production. Equipment that was in demand, such as armoured cars, artillery, guns and ammunition components were manufactured in Durban. In addition, the demand for locally manufactured textiles, chemicals and electronics increased because goods could not be imported during the war.³

With the rapid growth in industry, there was a simultaneous need for cheap labour. This resulted in a demand for skilled labour, especially in the manufacturing sector, which was reserved exclusively for whites. However, during this period Smuts expediently pointed out that race did not matter as he saw 'white and black as fellow South Africans, standing together in the hour of danger'.⁴

What followed was a dramatic relaxation of the influx control legislation. At the same time, Durban's municipality made a concerted attempt to introduce a more repressive system of influx control, in order to maintain tighter control of Africans entering the

3. Katzen: Industry in Durban, pp.20-25.

4. Oakes: Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa, p.360.

city. In 1942, the war effort placed an enormous burden on the state's human resources and the Minister of Native Affairs, D. Reys decided to suspend influx control legislation. Durban had to follow suit in this regard.⁵

The combined effect of Durban's relaxation of influx control and the wartime economic boom led to Africans flocking to the city. The fluctuations in Durban's economy demanded a more flexible implementation of the influx control policy. Durban's economy was seasonal and often short term and it depended on the number of ships that docked at the Durban harbour and on the holiday trade. In the long term, it depended on wider business conditions that prevailed in the area.⁶

This policy suited the industrial sector's demand for cheap labour. Pampallis states that during the war period, the industrial labour force grew by 53 per cent, the overwhelming majority of whom were African.⁷

Economic development in the 1940s will be discussed in respect of each race group, already mentioned in this study. Each race group was affected in a vastly different manner by economic circumstances and burgeoning capitalism.

5. Ibid, p.361.

6. NA, Durban Town Clerks Files, (DTCF) 4/1/3/1621.

7. Pampallis: Foundations of the New South Africa, p.152.

Africans

Maylam points out that Durban became a natural destination for thousands of impoverished rural Africans for two reasons. Firstly, reserve economies began to crumble resulting in poverty and secondly because of the search for employment in the industrial sector.⁸

According to the Durban municipality's files, 'poverty in the city holds out more chances of survival than poverty in the countryside.'⁹ As a result Durban's African population soared from 63 457 in 1936 to about 150 000 in 1945. The population increase gave an irreversible stabilisation to the male: female ratio. Between 1936 and 1946 Durban's African female population almost doubled from about 14 200 to about 28 000. The ratio of African males to African females decreased from 3,46:1 to 2,65:1¹⁰

The stabilization of African families within the confines of the city led to a gradual increase in family sizes with a significant number of children being born. The Durban municipality did not keep a record of the mortality figures of Black children. By the 1940s, Hellman notes that more than half of the children born to African women in Durban lived away from their parents, with rural relatives, for at least part of their childhood.¹¹ The majority of the children born in the city never lived beyond their first birthday. The first few years of life were extremely dangerous for most African urban

8. Maylam: A History of African People's of South Africa, p.150-151.

9. NA, DTCF, subject no. 290 P, Judicial Commission on Native Affairs in Durban, chapter II, p.1.

10. Ibid.

11. E. Hellman: Rooiyard (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1934), p.13.

children. The main reasons accounting for child mortality were the lack of water and ablution facilities, and malnutrition. As rural areas became depopulated, the growing poverty on the land forced mothers to take their children back to the towns.

According to a government population survey for 1945, 74% of Durban's African population were migrants.¹² This figure was not an objective one because the government of the day wanted to portray a negative image of the African presence within the city. In the same year, an unofficial estimate recorded that 50% of Africans in the city were migrants.¹³ The disparity in figures illustrates the difficulty in trying to establish accurate estimates of who were workers and who were migrants and non-migrants. Furthermore many African workers were weekly commuters between Durban and the reserves and therefore to classify them would be problematic and scientifically unsound.

In the 1940s, the differentiation of labour power was a demographic reality in Durban and Africans took advantage of the relaxation of influx control and the outbreak of World War Two to free themselves from both government and municipal control. In Durban, this was reflected by the massive mushrooming of shack settlements in places like Cato Manor. By 1941, there were approximately 5000 shack settlements, a figure that had risen to 50 000 in 1950.¹⁴ Africans also rented land and homes from wealthy Indian landowners in Clairwood, Jacobs and Cato Manor. The population density and the lack of essential facilities made living conditions extremely unbearable in Cato Manor.

12. NA, DTCF, 4/1/3/1619, Proclamation no. 39, 1 March 1945.

13. Ibid.

14. Maylam: A History of the African People of South Africa, p. 179.

The Durban municipality admitted that it did not have the capacity to accommodate the augmentation of the African population.

However, for its inhabitants it offered a number of advantages in that it was largely free from municipal control, with the occasional police raid. Furthermore, it was in close proximity to places of work and to the municipal market for which the informal sector produced.¹⁵

The Natal Mercury reported that thousands of unskilled African workers in the Durban area were living below the breadline and were subject to desperate conditions of poverty and disease.¹⁶ Unemployment drove many Africans in Cato Manor to become involved in illicit liquor production.

African women faced acute hardship. It was reported in The Daily News that 'a Bantu woman is always considered a minor and on the death of her husband her separate existence and that of her children is not legally recognized in urban areas'.¹⁷ According to the Bantu Child Welfare Society, there were several thousand African women in a similar predicament in Durban, and their number was not likely to decrease. Widowed African mothers earned less than two pounds a month and were desperately in need of help. No maintenance grants were made available to Africans in rural areas and in cases of dire poverty the Native Commissioner in that area authorized pauper rations.

15. Ibid.

16. The Natal Mercury, 10 May 1943.

17. The Daily News, 18 November 1946.

In Durban, a widow was eligible for a maintenance grant for her family, only if the Native Commissioner was satisfied that her circumstances were indigent. In most instances, maintenance grants were denied to African women. The Durban Bantu Child Welfare Society reported that from its inception in 1936 it had only processed 26 cases for maintenance grants.¹⁸

This reveals that many African women did not apply for grants and for those that did, their cases were scrutinized resulting in a number of women and children being repatriated to the rural areas by the Native Commissioner. Other women chose to eke out a living by performing chores such as washing and ironing of clothes for white families rather than risk repatriation.

The following case study illustrates the unfortunate effects of the legal and social disabilities of African women and children:

The woman had been married according to Christian rites for more than 14 years. She had five children whose ages ranged from four to thirteen years. Her husband died in 1942. Her children had all gone to school. The father had been paying 30 shillings a month for rent and when he died all income ceased and the family was left destitute.¹⁹

According to African tradition, women should be supported by the head of the clan or the tribal leader or by a guardian - in - law. However, 'this woman was unwilling to be forced to live with her pagan guardian in the countryside, because her children would be

18. KCAL, M.B. Laviopierre Papers, file 15.

19. The Daily News, 10 May 1946.

unable to attend school, they would be deprived of their religion, and further, her husband's relatives would be unwilling to receive such a burden especially in these days of food scarcity and high prices.' ²⁰ Only if an African widow had a son who was a poll tax payer, was she permitted to live in the urban locations. More often than not, she found shelter to house her family in shack settlements. Most African women settled in Booth Road, Cato Manor with their children. This settlement was a notorious breeding ground for all types of vices and disease.²¹

Industrial towns changed the nature of learning for children. Unlike the rural areas where children watched their parents and learnt survival skills, in the towns parents worked away from home and children therefore had no practical knowledge of how their caregivers earned a living. In the town, most children performed chores for their parents or worked, while others, whose parents could afford it, attended school.

Whites

During the 1940s white families living in Durban, had to compete with blacks for jobs and urban space because of the absence of influx control. Gradually the influx of Africans to Durban began to outstrip the demand for labour. Consequently, the white electorate complained to the city fathers about the increasing number of blacks settling in and around Durban permanently, and demanded the reintroduction of influx control legislation.

20. Ibid.

21. I.L. Edwards: 'Mkhumbane, Our Home: African Shantytown Society in Cato Manor Farm, 1946-60', Ph.D. thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1989, p.21.

However, the reaction to white complaints was reflected in reports by the Smit Committee and the Fagan Commission. Both these reports were clear concerning the inevitability of African urbanisation and the irreversibility of labour stabilisation. Minister of Native Affairs, P. van der Byl, clarified his position on the issue of African urbanization in a meeting with the Durban municipality in November 1942:

The influx of families is the result of industrial development. Industry requires a permanent labour force, which gives greater efficiency. It will pay higher wages for a man who will stay on the job all year round with an annual two or three week holiday. Therefore, the Native no longer goes home every six or nine months. But he is not prepared to sacrifice his family life so he brings his family to town and houses them where he can.²²

The permanency of African occupation in the city was a major concern among members of the Durban municipality during the 1940s. During this period several conservative bodies and figures in the local government began to call for the immediate re-implementation of influx control. This was done in an attempt to cut back on the migration of Africans to the city and to keep a check on crime. For example, T.J. Chester, manager of the municipal Native Administration Department, stated that since the relaxation of the pass system, 'Durban had become the refuge for a considerable number of work-shy and dissolute natives and under the existing conditions it was not possible to deal expeditiously with these undesirables'.²³

The city's white fathers were dissatisfied with the urban influx of blacks, which they perceived was exacerbating Durban's social problems. In an attempt to accede to the

22. NA, DTCTF, 4/1/3/1622. Minutes of a meeting of the Durban municipal council, 13 September 1945.

23. Ibid.

feelings of the white electorate, the municipality began to regulate urban migration of blacks in accordance with industries' labour demands.

Although influx control legislation was relaxed in May 1942, within a few months, it was reimposed. This was largely due to complaints from the white electorate in various cities, including Durban, over the large number of Africans resident in urban centres. The Durban municipality responded by issuing a proclamation in December 1942 to curtail African migration to the city. The proclamation imposed restrictions on the right of Africans to enter urban areas. All Africans over sixteen years of age were compelled to carry 'Native passes' that were issued by the Native Affairs Department.²⁴

Africans were required to show their pass to any white policeman, civil servant or employer. Failure to comply would result in arrest, imprisonment or a fine for Africans. Later the pass took the form of a 'Reference Book', which contained detailed information that had to be signed by one's employer every month.²⁵

The reintroduction of influx control legislation in Durban led to the breakdown of family units. This negatively affected African indigent families. Some children had to return to the rural areas.

24. N. Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (Randburg, Mc Donald Purnell, 1995), p.54.

25. Ibid.

Indians

During the 1940s, Indian workers experienced enormous hardship, which was compounded by the racism they experienced. They also lacked the vote, the possession of which, according to most historians was crucial in explaining why white workers were able to improve their position dramatically over time. On the other hand, they were caught by African attempts to secure urban jobs and space.²⁶

Hence, Indians were concerned about proposals to 'introduce legislation to effect the segregation of non-Europeans residentially, politically, socially and industrially.'²⁷

Whites, particularly those in Natal, urged the Smuts's government to introduce legislation to prevent the 'penetration' of Indians into urban and peri-urban areas. Councillor S.M. Petterson remarked, 'If Parliament was not prepared to pass the Segregation Bill, then the Europeans of Durban should take a stand and segregate themselves and say we are going to live here and nobody else.'²⁸ Smuts was urged to satisfy their demands but, he was cautious, because both India and South Africa were part of the allied forces in World War Two (1939-1945). Smuts was reticent about antagonizing India because of the war effort. H.G. Lawrence, Minister of the Interior, urged the Durban City Council to reach consensus with the Indian community on the issue of 'voluntary segregation'.²⁹

However Durban's white community, spearheaded by the Durban Joint Wards Association demanded, 'A bold policy of segregation must be initiated NOW!'³⁰

26. R. Davies: Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa 1900-1960 (Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1979), pp.14-16.

27. The Natal Mercury, 27 February 1939.

28. The Daily News, 31 May 1939.

29. D. Bagwande: A people on trial - for breaching racism: the struggle for land and housing of the Indian people of Natal, 1940-1946 (Durban, Madiba Publishers, 1991), p.52.

30. Margaret Ballinger Papers, document no. 2515. Letter from the Durban Joint Wards Association to Smuts, 1941.

Mabel Palmer suggested that Indian 'penetration' could be attributed to other reasons. For instance, she stated that 'penetration' was inevitable with the shifting population prevalent in a rapidly developing city like Durban. Furthermore, she noted that Indians were paying the same rates as whites, but they did not receive the same range and quality of services provided by the Durban municipality.³¹ Monty Naicker of the Natal Indian Congress was adamant that Indians could not give up living where they chose to 'voluntarily or by law'.³² Smuts found himself in an invidious position. He faced increasing pressure from white protestors and a solid defence put up by Indian leaders. Hence, he decided to appoint the Broome Commission 'to investigate the occupation of white owned sites for trading or residential purposes by Indians in Natal and the Transvaal from January 1927'.³³ The Commission released its report on 11 October 1941 and noted that whites were unduly worried about Indians living in their midst and that the incidence of penetration was not acute. However, a year after the First Broome Commission another delegation of whites claimed that the incidence of Indian penetration in Durban had reached crisis proportions.

This prompted the Minister of Interior, Lawrence, to launch the Second Broome Commission on 7 December 1942.³⁴ The findings of the Second Broome Commission revealed that there had been 326 cases of Indians acquiring land in white areas.³⁵

31. Daily News, 16 March 1940.

32. The Leader, 17 October 1987.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Bagwandeem: A people on trial, p.52.

35. DC, Fourth cable from the Natal Indian Congress to Swami Bhawani Dayal in India, 2 April 1943.

The Natal Indian Congress protested against the inaccurate figures given at the Commission, indicating that they made up only 25% of Durban's population and owned only 4% of the land in Durban.³⁶ Notwithstanding these protests, Lawrence informed parliament that racial residential segregation would be effected to eradicate all such penetration. Hence on 7 April 1943, Lawrence introduced the Trading and Occupation of Land Restriction Bill No.35 of 1943, in the Transvaal and Natal. This Act was commonly referred to as the 'Pegging Act' or, 'Black Bill'.³⁷ This act 'pegged' land for a three-year period until March 1946. The status quo concerning ownership and occupation of land remained. The act also barred any sale of land along racial lines.³⁸ Influx control and the 'Pegging Act' were specifically introduced by Smuts' government to stifle the growth and development of black people and to perpetuate the minority interests of the white elite.

Organisations to assist the indigent

Unlike in the other provinces, the Natal Social Welfare Department and the municipality provided no poor relief. The only state social agency that helped Black women was the Bantu Child Welfare Society of Durban. The society gave hundreds of women food parcels and provided others with money with which to pay rent.³⁹ Indigent Indians were still to a large extent catered for by organizations such as the Aryan Benevolent Home and the Durban Indian Children Welfare.

36. DC, Times of India, 7 April 1943.

37. NA, Statute: Trading and Occupation of Land (Transvaal and Natal) Restriction Act no. 35 of 1943.

38. Ibid.

39. The Daily News, 10 May 1946.

The Bantu Social Welfare Association

As the war progressed, Africans, in particular, suffered the effects of food shortages. The Durban municipality was reluctant to develop a tangible social relief policy to assist African indigent families. This responsibility was taken up by a group of volunteers. White philanthropists such as J.V. Holland, R. Annes (social workers) and several helpers established the Bantu Social Welfare Association in 1943.⁴⁰ It was located at the old Victoria League depot, in West Street. The main aim of the association was to help indigent African families living in Durban. Several pleas via the media were made for goods such as vegetables, groceries, clothing and cash donations. The cash was used to buy milk for babies and children. The goods were distributed to about 500 indigent African children and women who were resident at the Durban Women's Hostel. The remainder of the food was sent to the Somtseu Road barracks for men.⁴¹ The efforts of the Bantu Social Welfare Association played a vital role in relieving the poverty that plagued indigent African families.

M.B. Lavoipierre and the Overport Detention Barracks

The socio-economic problems experienced by Africans and the Durban municipality's stance on this issue was of great concern to Mrs M.B. Lavoipierre. Lavoipierre was initially a self-appointed social activist among the 'natives' and later Chairman of the Bantu Child Welfare, a position she held for a quarter of a century. She became acutely aware of the plight of African children in the greater Durban area.⁴² This was because of her work among the poor in these communities.

40. KCAL, Lavoipierre Papers, file 16.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

The issue of poverty amongst Durban's African community prompted Lavoipierre to write a letter to the editor of The Natal Mercury in 1942, which contained the following:

For years, the native problem has been shelved until it now assumes gigantic proportions. With the advent of the Europeans to this country, the native became a prey to diseases hitherto unknown to him, and through ignorance these diseases have spread until they threaten to extinguish the race. In what way are medical benefits going to be of assistance to them? In order to seek a solution, it is necessary to ascertain the root causes of their standard of living. Primarily, we must obtain their respect and trust by manifesting an interest in their welfare and treating them like human beings. If necessary a Bill could be introduced making it a punishable offence for a European to level an unprovoked insult at a native...Our problem is a national one that must be tackled by South Africans well versed in native lore and customs, as they alone can fully appreciate the difficulties attendant upon such a scheme.⁴³

This letter outlines clearly the kind of treatment that Africans received at the hands of the municipality and whites in general. It was also a call for the white population to pool their efforts in order to assist Black families.

Until 1945, the Smuts' government made provision only for white families. Particular preference was given to families of white soldiers who participated in the war effort. Furthermore, the governments of both Hertzog and Smuts ensured that adequate social agencies were established to assist white indigent families. According to Lavoipierre white children whose parents were destitute, divorced or unemployed were given special social and maintenance grants. There were thus no instances of white vagrant children to be found in and around Durban.⁴⁴ One of the reasons for this was the provision of free

43. Ibid, file 15.

44. Ibid, file 16. Letter from Lavoipierre to the chief magistrate of the Durban law courts, undated, p.1.

and compulsory education for white children. This was not the case for African and Indian children. Schooling was neither free nor compulsory and the state did not feel obliged to provide schools or teachers for children of colour. The community took responsibility for the education of African and Indian children. There were a few African schools in towns that were run by missionaries and the church. These mission schools were usually grossly overcrowded and all the classes were held in one large room.⁴⁵ In the world of poverty children were required by their parents to bring in extra money. Hence, absenteeism from school was common. In 'Growing up in the ghetto', a teacher states that school attendance on Mondays and Fridays was considerably lower than on other days.⁴⁶ Some of the reasons for absenteeism included errands for parents, looking after baby siblings, while the mother was at work, fetching washing and illness.⁴⁷ The type of education received was imposed by the white ruling elite, which was used to train African children to become docile workers in an industrial society. The lessons learnt at school were not relevant to the every day life of the informal settlement or slum. Therefore, many indigent children were reluctant to get an education and chose to loiter in white suburbs in search of jobs or alms.

In February 1943 pressure from the municipality to keep the city for the exclusive use of whites led to the municipal police arresting a number of vagrant African and Indian children in the greater Durban area.⁴⁸ These children were charged for trespassing and some were imprisoned at the Overport police station.⁴⁹

45. Hellman: Rooyard, pp.14-16.

46. J. Cohen: 'Growing up in the ghetto, during the 1930's', paper presented to the Gubbins Society, University of Witwatersrand, 31 March 1982, pp.10-11.

47. Ibid, p12.

48. KCAL, Lavoipierre Papers. Letter from Lavoipierre to the Chief magistrate of the Durban law courts, undated, p.1

49. Ibid, Lavoipierre Papers, file 15.

Others were taken to court. If the magistrate found them guilty of vagrancy they were given lashes, which were meted out by a white police officer. The state offered no rehabilitation for indigent Black children. Those who had previous convictions were sent to what was euphemistically referred to as 'places of safety' such as the Overport Detention Barracks⁵⁰, located adjacent to the Overport police station and specifically built for African and Indian children.

In a letter to The Natal Mercury conditions at the police cells were described as follows:

... children of all ages and various race groups lived in the most squalid conditions in the Overport police cells as there was nowhere else for them to go. Some of the children had been picked up by the police for petty offences, others abandoned or lost. As this was wartime and black - out essential, these children lived in a twilight world for weeks often months on end.⁵¹

On reading the above letter, Mrs Lavoipierre stated that she felt that the writer had exaggerated the position somewhat. Nevertheless, on further investigation and a visit to the cells she realized that the writer had not.⁵² On 28 February 1943, Lavoipierre, together with J.V. Holland and a Mrs Jacobs, a social worker, decided to visit the children, between the ages of 8 -16 who were detained at the Overport Detention Barracks.⁵³ The barracks consisted of three cells, two above ground level (about 12ft x 18ft) and one below (about 10ft x 11ft) from which there was an access to a pen, approximately 8ft. by 10ft.

50. For the purposes of this study, only the Overport Detention Barracks will be discussed. This place of safety for indigent children caused enormous controversy in 1940's. Further, it was the first place to house children of colour in Durban. The appalling living conditions led to a public furore and the growth of social activism for improved quality of life for indigent children.

51. The Natal Mercury, 19 March 1943.

52. KCAL, Lavoipierre Papers, file 15.

53. Letter from the Action Committee for Non- European and Coloured League for Social Justice to the Chief magistrate of the Durban law court, circa 1943, p.1.

The walls that enclosed the barracks were about ten feet high with the top covered by wire mesh. On entering the premises Lavoipierre stated that 'no word – picture' could aptly describe the 'hideousness' of the scene. The room was dark and she had to watch her step for fear that she might tramp on the children who sat on the floor. There were about 20 'Native and Indian' boys between the ages of eight and sixteen years that were crammed together. Under normal circumstances, the room could only accommodate six boys.⁵⁴ Altogether there were 7 girls and 47 boys who were crammed into two cells. According to W. Madeley, Minister of Social Welfare, the cells could only accommodate 24 children.⁵⁵

After her visit, Lavoipierre noted, 'I couldn't rest until something was done. The writer of the letter, another friend of mine and I formed ourselves into the Overport Action Committee also referred to as the Action Committee and we investigated every possible channel to seek a solution.'⁵⁶ J.V. Holland was elected chairman of the Committee. This organisation made several appeals to the Durban municipality to monitor and check the physical and spiritual deterioration of the urban child. In spite of the negative publicity regarding the Overport Barracks and indigent children in general, the Durban municipality continued with its draconian policy of cracking down on vagrant children.⁵⁷ Lavoipierre argued that children were forced onto the streets, because of destitution, vagrancy, disobedience, and parental neglect and it was the municipality's responsibility

54. KCAL, Lavoipierre Papers, file 15. Case Study of a detained child. A young 'native' lad aged eight years. He was 'picked' by the police for loitering. He was unable to give any information regarding his home or parents and therefore was detained at the Overport Barracks, until a place of safety is found for him.

55. Ibid, files 15 and 16.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid, file 24.

to provide adequate social support to assist indigent families.⁵⁸ During subsequent visits by the Action Committee, Lavoipierre stated:

she failed to take note of an Indian child who was lying on a blanket placed on the cement floor. His whimper drew my attention, I consoled him and his whimper stopped and later fell into a doze.” On questioning an Indian child about the sick boy, Lavoipierre realized that he was ‘a little hair-lipped fellow’ that she often saw on the streets begging. She noted that an operation to his lip had changed his appearance but he was unable to speak, as he had no palate. Lavoipierre confessed that the condition in which the destitute children lived ‘so affected me that I could not check the flow of tears, which blinded my eyes.’⁵⁹

Holland observed that in the second cell, occupied by ‘Native’ girls,⁶⁰ conditions were equally appalling, ‘the sanitary pan was broken and the children’s blankets were seeped in the overflow. A receptacle was full of water similar to the one provided by the SPCA, which the children had to use for drinking’.⁶¹ Most children who lived in detention were undernourished, receiving staple meals that consisted of mealie meal and fat three times a day. Basic hygiene was not observed and a regular change of clothing was not deemed necessary by the municipality. Some children remained in the same clothing for any period up to six months.⁶²

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. KCAL, Lavoipierre Papers, file 24. Case Study- A young 16 year old girl who has been classified as ‘Non-European’ has been accused by her mother for consorting with Indians and appears before the magistrate of the Juvenile Court. On investigation and cross- questioning, the magistrate decides to remand the child to the Overport Detention Barracks, until a suitable vacancy occurs in a reformatory. The state fails to provide rehabilitative surroundings for her. Instead, while she lies in detention for 16 days her only companions are Indian and ‘native’. Hence, the state has failed to cater for her needs.

61. Ibid, file 15.

62. Letter from the Overport Action Committee to H. Goldberg, M.P., 21 March 1943.

The Durban magistrates' court failed to provide social workers to care for the needs of the children. A sergeant from the Overport Police Station was deployed to supervise them. 'Native' constables guarded the children, both boys and girls, making them vulnerable to various forms of abuse. There were no positive role models to turn to for guidance and girls had no woman supervisor to provide them with much needed female intervention and motherly advice. There was no woman in charge even of the tiny children.⁶³

Members of the Action Committee were adamant that the responsibility for indigent children should come under the jurisdiction of the Durban municipality. The government department that was immediately responsible for indigent children was the Department of Social Welfare, which had neglected its duties that had been left to a small band of citizens to undertake.⁶⁴ Furthermore, other prominent members of the Durban community made public their criticisms of the social welfare crisis that existed at the time. The Reverend Miles Cadman, M.P. sent the following telegram to the Minister of Social Welfare, 'Have inspected Overport non-European juvenile detention barracks. Police blameless, but accommodation hopelessly inadequate. Cells dangerously overcrowded. Children of seven years and even younger mixed up with much older criminal types. Please grant additional facilities immediately. This matter very urgent'.⁶⁵ In March 1943 Minister Madeley was on an official visit to Durban. Lavoipierre and members of the Action Committee heard of his visit and upon making representations, Lavoipierre was granted a five-minute interview with him. She begged him to visit the

63. KCAL, Lavoipierre Papers, file 16.

64. Ibid, file 15 and 16.

65. The Natal Mercury, 19 March 1943.

Overport cells and after much persuasion, he agreed.⁶⁶ Lavoipierre recalled the following: 'We got there and I ushered the Minister into one of the cells. He nearly fainted at the stench and the first figure that he saw in this dark hole was a tiny Indian child lying on the floor, frightened and blinking at the sudden shaft of light.' The Minister was shaken to the core. 'I wouldn't put a pig in there,' the Minister said. 'You have my word that I will investigate the matter.'⁶⁷ The action that the minister took was to instruct the relevant local municipality to rectify the situation and through his ministry provided financial support for the construction of a new facility for children.

In addition, the Child Welfare Society viewed with concern the incarceration of young black children in the central grille, pending their appearance before the juvenile court.⁶⁸ It urged that immediate steps be taken to rectify the situation. The Society stated that it was undesirable for children, irrespective of race or colour, to be placed in the same cells and be exposed to adult prisoners. This had serious long term psychological effects on black children. The Child Welfare Society later sent its resolution to the following organisations for consideration: the Durban Child Welfare, the Department of Social Welfare and the Bantu Child Welfare, so that the Department of Social Welfare could take the appropriate action. A letter dated 27 July 1944 was sent to Dr C. Steyn, Minister of Justice, for consideration. The minister responded by saying that the matter regarding the treatment of children was receiving attention.⁶⁹ With the relevant government departments 'dragging their heels' on these issues, the Action Committee exerted

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Minutes of a meeting of the Durban Child Welfare Society, June 1944.

69. Ibid.

pressure on the Durban municipality to finally realize its folly. The authorities at the Durban municipality had also, for too long, procrastinated in rectifying this parlous state of affairs at the Overport Barracks. A common excuse was that the country at large was preoccupied with its participation in the World War. The recalcitrant attitude of the municipality did not preclude the Action Committee from resorting to passive resistance tactics. They protested by spending a night on what is presently the councillors' parking lot, next to the Durban City Hall. This prompted a spate of red faces and humiliating publicity. The protest yielded the desired response.⁷⁰ The municipality decided to remedy the problems facing destitute children in Durban and requested that the Action Committee render assistance in locating new premises to house the children. Various members of the Committee began viewing properties for the relocation of the Overport Barracks. White residents complained that vacant homes and properties in Durban should not be used to house indigent children.

Despite this, the Action Committee continued to search for homes and eventually found suitable property in Randles Road in Sydenham. Within a few weeks, the municipality officially sanctioned the purchase of the property and the movement of the children.

Subsequently, the magistrate of the Durban court ordered the relocation of 88 children to their new home in Sydenham.⁷¹

The heinous conditions that the children were subjected to at the Overport Barracks meant that all sexes, juvenile delinquents and criminal adults dwelled indiscriminately

70. *The Natal Mercury*, 7 August 1974.

71. KCAL, *Lavoipierre Papers*, file 16.

together in the same squalid environment. This was a violation of children's rights.

Lavoipierre was opposed to the idea that children who were victims of social circumstances were housed under the same roof as those who had been convicted in the children's court of a particular crime.⁷² She ensured that this situation was remedied when she became chairman of the Bantu Child Welfare Society in 1949.⁷³

The debacle regarding the Overport Barracks and the Durban municipality's attitude in addressing child indigency among blacks elicited widespread public condemnation from social rights activists, the most notable of whom was Lavoipierre, amongst others. Organisations such as the Overport Action Committee played a pivotal role in garnering public awareness on the contemptible treatment of indigent black children. These agents of change embarked on vigorous campaigns to challenge the status quo, even to the extent of corresponding with the social welfare minister and escorting him on an in loco inspection of the Overport Barracks. This finally culminated in the establishment of a new, spacious facility for indigent children, which, in 1961, became known as the Valley View Place of Safety.⁷⁴

Conclusion

The 1940s was a turning point in South African history, not only did political fortunes change, but social activism gained momentum. The outbreak of the Second World War brought about a reluctant easing of influx control legislation.

72. The Natal Mercury, 17 March 1960.

73. *Ibid*, 7 August 1974.

74. KCAL, Lavoipierre Papers, file 16.

This led to the diaspora of Africans from the rural to urban areas, and in a short space of time, it was estimated that 50% of the urban African population were migrants. The presence of migrants in the city suited labour intensive capitalists, while conversely the white bourgeoisie community of Durban complained incessantly. The question of Indian penetration in white suburbs saw the Broome Commission being ushered in. In an endeavour to pander to white opinion, the city's fathers, acting on the instruction of the national government, decided to re-introduce influx control legislation.

This had far-reaching repercussions for indigent black families and children. Unemployment amongst Africans and Indians soared and the municipality did little to assist. Consequently, the unemployed resorted to vagrancy, begging and crime to eke a living. Under these destitute circumstances, children assisted their parents by undertaking chores, looking for casual labour in white suburbs or in factories in an attempt to sustain a living. The municipal police were instructed to crack down on vagrants in white suburbs. This resulted in the arrest of children for vagrancy. They were housed under abject conditions at the Overport Detention Barracks. The notoriety of these barracks gained the attention of many socially conscious members of the Durban community culminating in the creation of social agencies that championed the human rights of indigent children. At the forefront was Lavoipierre, who launched the Overport Action Committee. This was the first organization to make a significant impact on the national government to transform its attitude towards social welfare among black indigent communities, an initiative that set the stage for the challenges of the post-war, apartheid era and beyond.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The notion of childhood, let alone the civil rights of children, was largely non-existent prior to the Enlightenment. Like the role of women, the role of children was confined to the spectre of shadow figures in the annals of history. It is only with the idealization of the nuclear family, the advent of democratic practices and the spread of consumer culture that children came to occupy the focal point of family interest.

The escalation in the number of indigent children in the greater Durban area from the turn of the twentieth century can largely be attributed to processes of urbanization and industrialization. These processes, ushered in mainly by the growth of the mining industry, led to the implementation of restrictive legislation, such as the migrant labour system, influx control and the 'pegging act'. These laws constrained the freedom among mainly African people and separated men from their families. Only men were permitted to reside in urban areas: their families being prevented from migrating to the cities. This resulted in the disintegration of the family system among traditional African and Indian communities and had the concomitant effect of increasing the number of indigent children in Durban.

Another aggravating issue was the erratic employment patterns between 1900 and 1945. Several factors contributed to unemployment - local and international wars, economic depression and the segregatory laws of the government being the principle factors.

Under conditions of meagre or no income generation, the underclasses were forced to endure conditions of abject poverty.

Poverty was one of the single most important factors which contributed to the rise in the number of indigent children in Durban. Under conditions of extreme hardship, some parents abandoned their children whilst others forced their children into the streets to fend for themselves. Many indigent children also ran away from the overwhelming trauma and neglect that immured socially dysfunctional families

In order to counteract indigence in white communities the government provided provincial relief schemes, which entrenched segregation and focused attention exclusively on the 'poor white' problem. An increase in white child indigency led to the creation of child - aid societies by private individuals who volunteered their services and resources. These societies expanded and were referred to as Child Welfare Societies. In 1919, the Durban Child Welfare Society was established and from its inception catered exclusively for white and coloured children. The central thrust of this society was to focus on white and coloured destitute, orphaned, abandoned and vagrant children.

Indigent African and Indian children continued to face the perils of poverty. In 1921 the Aryan Benevolent Home was established to assist indigent Indian families. In 1927 the Aryan Benevolent Home Council decided to construct a children's home. In the same year the Durban Indian Child Welfare Society was also established. This alleviated the number of Indian vagrant children on the streets of Durban.

In the 1920s several male African children were charged for loitering the streets of Durban. In 1921 Maurice Webb and a few white philanthropists established a home for indigent African children known as the Brandon Bantu Hostel. The Durban municipality, with its segregationist policies, did nothing to cater for indigent African children.

The Great Depression of the 1930s saw an escalation in unemployment across racial lines. The Durban municipality was quick to respond to assist its ailing white community. Several initiatives were launched to assist indigent white families such as the Juvenile Affairs Board, Durban Benevolent Society and the Community Chest. These organizations were supported financially by the national and provincial governments.

As far as Indians were concerned, a number of community generated initiatives were introduced including a relief fund, The Motala Lads' Hostel and an expansion of work undertaken by the Durban Indian Child Welfare.

African families who were affected by the depression were assisted by a committee launched by Webb and his colleagues. This did little to curb indigence particularly among African children. The arrest of children by municipal police officers prompted social activists to push for the establishment of a place of safety for African children. In 1936, the Durban municipality succumbed to community pressure and established the Bantu Child Welfare Society. In the 1940s African joblessness and poverty continued unabated. This resulted in a simultaneous increase in the number of indigent children in around and Durban. The municipality responded by cracking down on vagrancy in white suburbs.

Many African and Indian children were arrested and detained in appalling conditions at the Overport Detention Barracks. Public pressure, from especially M.B. Lavoipierre and her colleagues, led to the Durban municipality eventually relocating these children to better premises at Valley View Place of Safety in Overport.

This study has shown that the lives of indigent children between 1900-1945 in South Africa were differentially affected along issues of race and class. In this dichotomy, race became the more pervasive issue as the country formalized its racial aberrations into an apartheid masterplan. This severely impacted on children of colour many of whom, under conditions of destitution and hopelessness, took to roaming the streets as gangs of street waifs.

It is a tribute to community initiatives such as the Community Chest, Brandon Bantu Hostel, Aryan Benevolent Home, The Durban Indian Child Welfare, The Motala Lads' Hostel, The Bantu Child Welfare, The Valley View Place of Safety and others that the plight of some of these children were reasonably addressed by institutional care.

Dr Dasarath Chetty, sociologist and president of the Child, Family and Community Care Centre of Durban has suggested that the provincial government and the Durban municipality create job opportunities and inject funds into rehabilitation centres for indigent families and disadvantaged people of all races.¹ This may help social welfare agencies cope with the overwhelming demand from indigent families.

1. Post, 28-31 October 1998.

The complacent attitude displayed by Durban's municipality with regard to addressing the issue of indigency calls for a resurgence of social activism that was prevalent in the 1940s. The community spirit displayed then, in establishing places of safety for the indigent and the passive protests against the government finally yielded just rewards. A move towards greater community awareness, solidarity and government support may ultimately help end the misery of so many indigent children in South Africa.

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